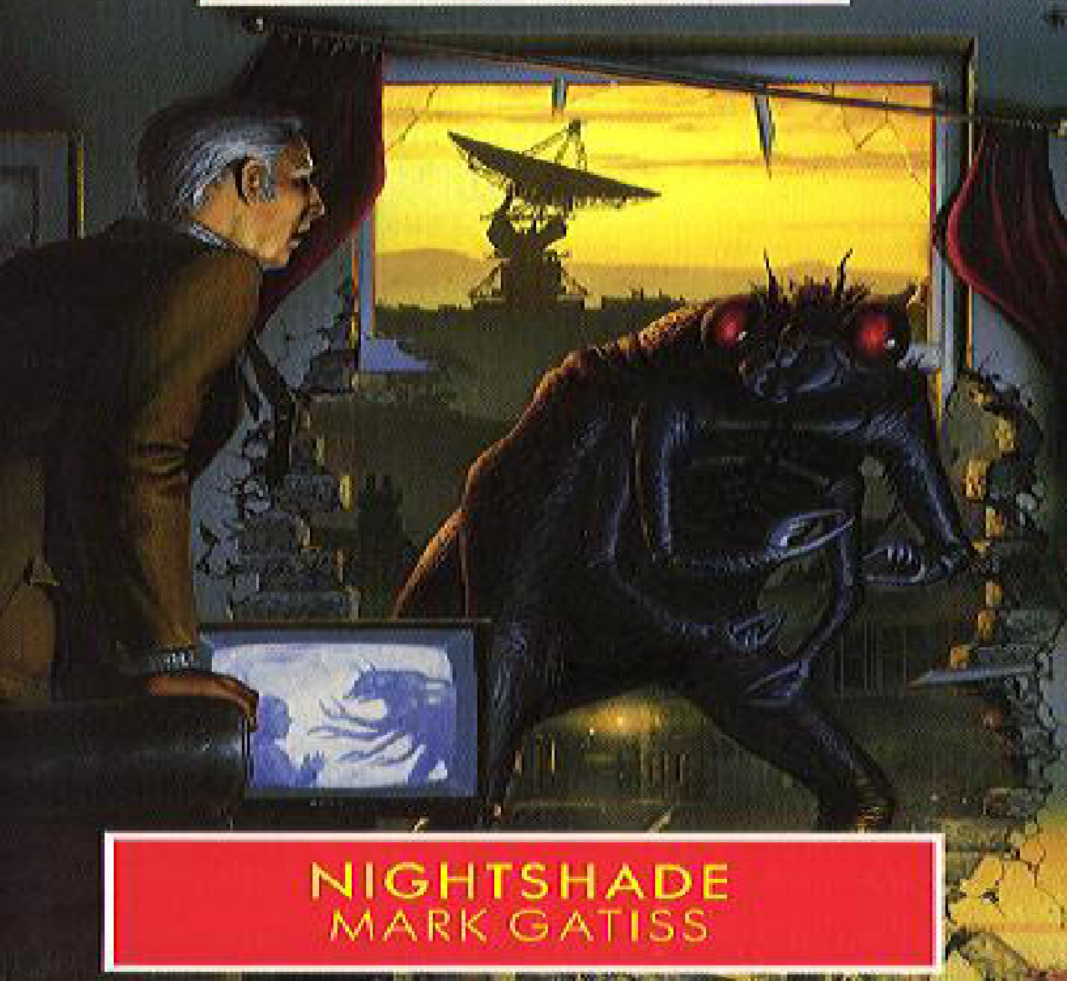
THE NEW

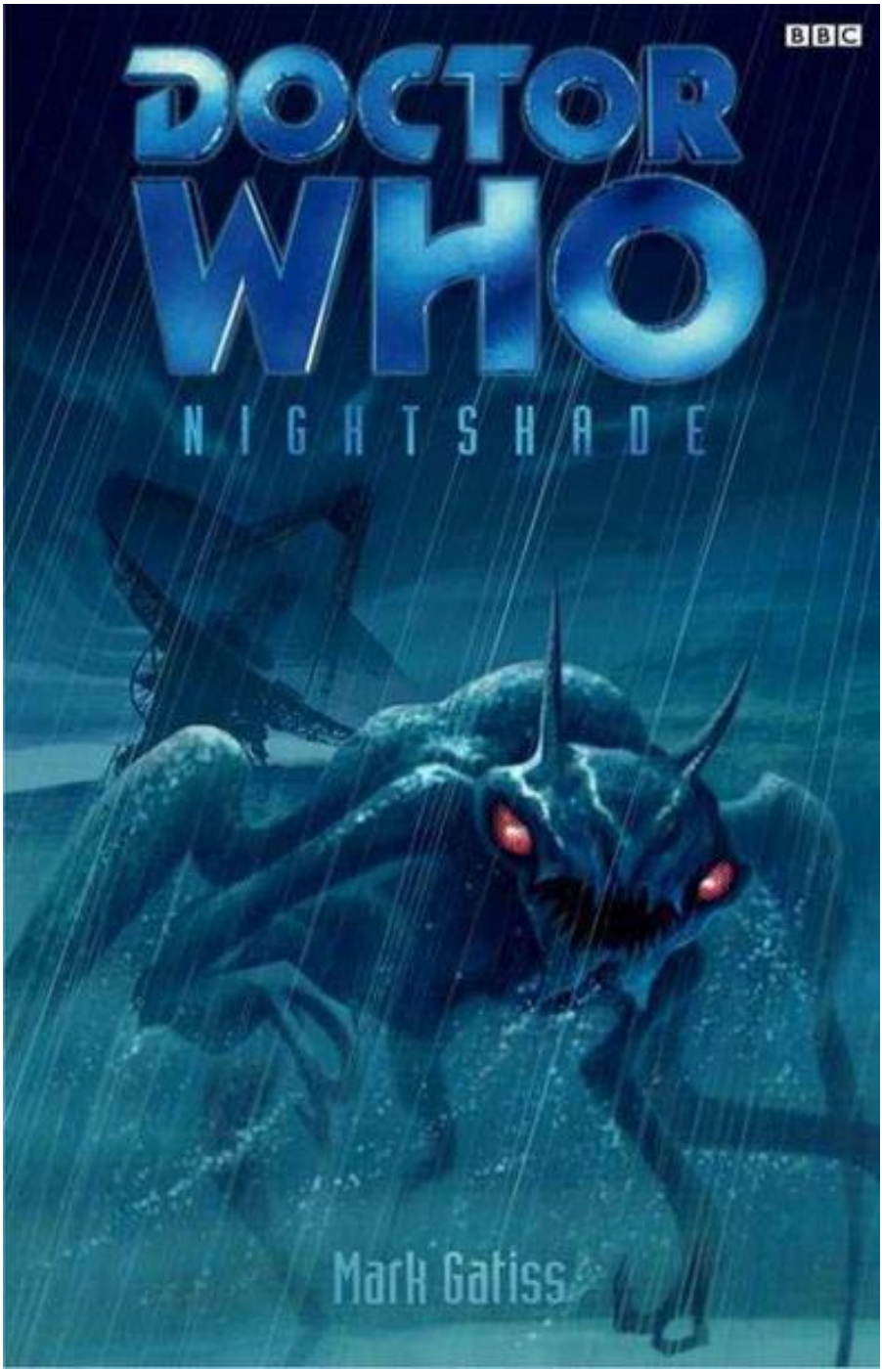
Doctor Who

ADVENTURES



NIGHTSHADE

MARK GATISS



DOCTOR WHO: NIGHTSHADE

Nightshade

By Mark Gatiss

Illustrated by Daryl Joyce

The Changing face of Doctor Who: The illustrations contained within this ebook portray the Seventh Doctor Who, whose physical appearance was later transformed when he was fatally wounded by gunfire.

His companion in this adventure is explosives expert Ace, a teenager from the 1980s.

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Editor's Note

Author's Introduction

Ah, nostalgia. So seductive. So dangerous. And so odd to Nightshade was originally written with a mature be feeling it for some of my own work. Nightshade, now audience in mind, and contains strong language. Some looking like the brittle-paged Tenth Planet I had as a kid, is characters also express racial attitudes prevalent in parts of fourteen years old! Like a child I never had. I remember it British society at the time the book is set. Nightshade may all so vividly. Seeing the Virgin writers' guidelines in DWB, therefore not be suitable for younger fans of the series.

writing my specimen chapters, coming home for Christmas 1991 to find the fantastically encouraging letter from Peter Darvill-Evans, the agonising wait to see whether the New Adventures would run beyond the initial four books...

The idea for what was originally called Nightfall came to me on a long coach journey from Leeds to - would you believe Cardiff? - a city that was then a long way off becoming the centre of the Doctor Who universe. I spotted a sci fi novel called Nightfall so the title instantly changed!

The basic concept was this, wouldn't it be fun if an actor from an old TV sci-fi series started to see in real life the monsters he faced in the programme?

At that stage, before the New Adventures had been announced, I suppose I dimly thought of it as a kind of play idea. A Play for Today idea, really. Although such things were extinct by the early 90s. I hadn't long graduated from 2

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college and was living a precariously hand to mouth existence in a haunted house in Leeds (It really was! 97

Archery Rd. Go and have a look!).

I had yet to make any sort of mark in showbiz but, when I read about Virgin's plans to continue the recently defunct Prologue

Doctor Who I felt in my bones: I CAN DO THIS. What appealed to me enormously, apart from the sheer thrill of being published was to have a shot at writing Doctor Who (the real thing, of course, was now impossible. Ha!). Not only that, but to write Doctor Who as I thought it should be done, effectively redressing what I felt to have been wrong with the programme in its later years.

All around the cluttered cloisters, musty rooms and high, As a result, what surprises me now, re-reading the book vaulted halls there was a deep and tangible hush. The only after so many years is how SERIOUS it is. Grim, in fact. But light in the virtually impenetrable gloom was of a peculiarly you have to remember that I was reacting against the sort of pellucid green, spilling out feebly from every heavy wooden garish Who of the late Eighties that I'd found an increasing door and misaligned stone. Everywhere, there was a terrible turn-off. Things were undoubtedly getting better, just when sense of stagnancy, imbuing the whole place with a fetid, the programme was cancelled, but there was still a sort of neglected atmosphere as though some great cathedral had muddled quality, an almost perverse refusal to tell a straight been flooded by a brackish lagoon.

-forward story that I found very frustrating. So I wanted From out of the cobwebbed shadows emerged a little

'Nightshade' to be an ultra- grim and horrific adventure in group of very old men, resplendent in their ornately the mould of favourites such as Genesis of the Daleks, The decorated robes.

Caves of Androzani and Frontios.

The least ancient of the group, a white-haired individual I liked the irony also that it was a story about the dangers with piercing eyes and a down-turned, haughty mouth, of nostalgia that was in itself, nostalgic. But I'd better start at lifted the hem of his robes as he detached himself from the the beginning, I suppose...

others, sending little flurries of dust over the flagstones. He murmured a few words of apology to his comrades and melted away into the shadows.

After a time he came to a small door inset in the crumbling stonework. He looked about him, senses alert, and lifted his hands to grip the lapels of his robes. His twinkling eyes darted from side to side. It was time.

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A man with a face like a deflating balloon, dressed in dark For a long time the seven remaining boxes stood in silence gold robes which were too big for him, crossed the corridor, with only the steady drip of the leaking roof to disturb the mumbling happily to himself. The white-haired man gloom. Then the man in the dark gold robes appeared in the pressed himself into a doorway until the fellow had passed.

doorway, tutting to himself. He regarded the seven boxes, It wouldn't do to be discovered now.

and the space where the eighth had been, with some When he was certain that he was alone, the old man annoyance.

opened the door with a spindly key and squeezed himself

'Oh no, no,' he said. 'This really won't do at all.'

through into darkness.

Beyond the door was a flight of stone steps, which he descended nimbly, leading into a huge, ink-black, domed chamber.

Arranged in a row were eight featureless objects about the size of horse boxes, their dull grey surfaces tinged by the familiar underwater-green.

The white-haired man lifted the heliotrope robes from around his shoulders and let them slip to the floor. He steepled his bony fingers and looked up at the ceiling high above his head. What was the night like out there? It had been so long since he'd ventured outside, smelled fresh air, seen the first frosts, watched the pale silver and bronze leaves disappearing under melting snow...

But now all that would be different. It was time to go.

There was a noise from somewhere close by and the old man hastily unlocked one of the featureless grey boxes.

'I must be quick,' he muttered. 'Yes, I must be very, very quick.'

A look of profound sadness seemed to come over his wise old face as he gave the hall one more sweep of his searching gaze. Then, with a heavy sigh, he vanished inside the box and closed the door.

There was a raucous, grinding moan and, quite suddenly, the old man and his protesting grey box simply faded away.

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'Same old routine isn't it, Jack Prudhoe?'

Yes, he despaired, yes, yes. Same old bloody routine.

Jack selected his favourite walking stick. The one with the horse's head carved on it. The one Win had given him on Chapter One

their tenth anniversary. He buttoned up his heavy raincoat and eased his feet into a pair of Wellingtons. With two pairs of socks on they almost fit.

'Off you go to the pub to get tanked up. And not a thought for me, oh no. Well, I've had enough. Either you start facing up to your responsibilities...'

Jack didn't hear the rest. He lifted the latch on the solid front door and stepped out into the rain.

Perhaps the world was dreaming. Dreaming as it drifted There was a dismal, slate-grey quality to the light which like an exotic butterfly through those gossamer summers did nothing to lift his spirits. A wintry dusk was creeping which seemed like they could never end, stretching pacific remorselessly over the village in defiance of the early hour.

arms around its people under a billion-dollar blue sky. And A short walk across the square stood The Shepherd's there were those who said there'd never been a better time Cross, a pub in which Jack had been drinking, man and boy, to be alive. Perhaps the world was dreaming ...

for nearly fifty years. He nearly chuckled as he remembered his dad smuggling him his first pint.

Jack Prudhoe scratched his bristly chin and cleared his The pub's comforting atmosphere of red flock wallpaper, throat loudly. He was in no mood to argue. Standing in the old wood and frosted glass rarely failed to cheer him up.

draughty hall of his little house, he wearily ran a hand Except, perhaps, on bleak days like this one.

through his thinning hair and rattled the walking sticks

'Afternoon, Jack.'

which cluttered the umbrella stand.

Jack nodded his hello to the landlord, Lawrence Yeadon,

'Are you listening to me?'

who stood drying glasses behind the long mahogany bar.

Win's voice stabbed at him like a needle. Jack kept his Lawrence tossed the teatowel on to his shoulder and rheumy old eyes fixed on the umbrella stand. Had it always grinned. He was always grinning. Or whistling.

been like this? Dreary days. Arguments. Going to the pub.

'Filthy weather,' he said cheerily. Jack grunted and looked Coming

back. Apologies. Another argument. Bed. Silence.

Lawrence up and down, noting with disapproval the Jack looked at Win's angry, pinched face as she continued younger man's turtleneck sweater and fashionably to berate him in a shrill monotone. Mouth like a horse's exaggerated sideburns. Silly bugger was too old to be back side, he thought idly. Win's grey eyes flashed following trends.

dangerously.

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Back in the days when the colliery was still open, Jack had that he'd first seen Win. She and her mother had just arrived been a good friend of young Lawrence, especially after he'd in Crook Marsham and moved into the old Shackleton married such a pretty young lass as Mrs Cockayne's eldest house on Faraday Street. Win was such a beautiful woman and produced a son, Robin. But his wife's untimely death in those days. Lovely thick auburn hair and soft, soft skin had left such a profound impression on Lawrence that he that seemed to shine...

had virtually withdrawn from village life, becoming sullen

'Can I get you girls a drink?' Jack had asked in a nervous and uncommunicative. However, after some years (much to voice. Win and her new friend Veronica Railton giggled into everyone's relief), he pulled himself together, got the their hands. They were already feeling rather daring having tenancy of the pub with little bother and married a lovely gone into the pub unchaperoned. Jack looked down at the widow from York called Betty Harper.

oversized uniform he'd been given and suddenly felt a fool.

These days, Lawrence was all sweetness and light. He and His army haircut was horribly severe and he felt self-Betty had recently returned from a holiday in Jersey and conscious about his sticky-out ears. Veronica peered at him were already planning their next excursion, rumoured to be from behind her thick spectacles. Win's big eyes looked him a cruise on the new Queen Elizabeth II.

up and down. She was wearing that red dress which her Lawrence grinned at Jack. The old man turned away mother had made for her. It was always her favourite.

thoughtfully. There was something about Lawrence which

'Well?' said Jack. Veronica giggled again but Win held his nagged at him. Perhaps he was just a bit too eager and gaze. 'There's something about a man in uniform,' she'd cheerful to be true. And there had been a lot of gossip said quietly.

recently about how ill Betty was looking.

Always had spirit that one. So beautiful. So beautiful...

Jack shrugged off these thoughts, turned back to the bar, Jack Prudhoe shook himself out of his reverie and took ordered a pint of mild and asked after Betty.

another sip of his pint, leaving a creamy semicircle on his

'Oh fine, fine,' said Lawrence, a little too quickly.

upper lip. His eyes strayed to the tatty Christmas Jack sat down at a table and closed his eyes, listening to decorations which Betty Yeadon had put across the bar only the gentle crackling of the fire. He was grateful that the the other day.

recently installed jukebox (one of Lawrence's efforts to His mind began to drift again. He and Win saying their

'liven the place up a bit') had fallen silent. Honestly, the farewells just before he was posted. Endless laughter and drivel people listened to nowadays. You couldn't tell the chatter. Going on trips over to Leeds and Ilkley Moor.

boys from the girls half the time.

Kissing by the falls at Haworth. And then parting. Jack Sipping his pint thoughtfully, Jack glanced into one of the waving to Win as she stood in that lovely red dress at the shadowed corners where a hefty wooden and cast-iron table station. Waving as the steam from the engine enveloped her.

stood, its surface littered with sodden beer mats. It was in After that had come the worst time of Jack's life: foul and that corner sometime

during the Great War (1916, wasn't it?) wretched war. Up to his knees in freezing water as star-10

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shells blossomed overhead. Half his comrades slaughtered and bitter woman she now was. They'd never even left the in that filthy mud. And then came the day he saw his best village. Despite all those plans, all those promises...

mate's head blown off and Johnny Hun put a bullet through Something caught Jack's eye as it flashed by the smoked Jack's chest, sending him home within the week. Home to glass of the pub window. He turned full around and his old Crook Marsham and his mum and dad. And home to Win, neck wrinkled in the none-too-clean collar of his shirt.

who had waited for him, despite the best efforts of the local A flash of red. There was something darting past the lads.

window, the smudged red of their clothes bobbing into The year after those university men came to the moor view like a lone poppy seen through a curtain of fine rain.

looking for old relics, Jack and Win finally tied the knot.

Jack moved closer and peered through the little area of

'We'll have a dozen kids,' he told her. 'And a house as big clear glass which spelt out the pub's name in big Victorian as Castle Howard. A garden full of roses, and chrysanths.

letters. There was a girl out there, dressed in a light summer Aye, you like chrysanths, don't you?'

frock. A red frock. Jack sensed its familiarity and something She'd turned her big eyes to him and smiled warmly. 'Oh, turned in his stomach.

Jack. What am I going to do with you?'

And then there was a face at the window. Pressed against Jack turned back to his pint and rubbed the ribs which the the smoked glass. A

pale, lovely face with a halo of thick bullet had smashed all those years ago. They still ached a bit hair. The girl giggled lightly and was gone.

in damp weather.

Jack stood up sharply, sending both table and beer He sighed heavily. Sometimes he just couldn't believe that crashing to the floor. Lawrence looked at him oddly.

the Win he'd loved and the woman who was now such a

'Jack?'

thorn in his side were one and the same. They'd had their The red blur began to diminish. Over towards the moor.

ups and downs, of course, like anybody else. One kiddie

'Jack? Are you all right?'

still-born. The other, named after his father, run down by a Jack Prudhoe turned and his careworn face was full of bus. Jack could see himself there even now, standing wonder. He suddenly knew he didn't have much time.

helplessly as the great, lumbering vehicle lurched around

'It's her, Lol,' he breathed. 'It's her!'

the corner. Then young Jackie running into the road. Time

'Who?'

slowing around them, moving like treacle. That awful noise Jack let out a high, hysterical laugh and stumbled out of as the bus's brakes howled, and then Win, turning to him the door. Lawrence hastened after him.

with such a look in those grey eyes. Accusing him. Little

'Jack! Your coat, man! You'll catch your death! Jack!'

Jackie breathing his last on that rain-washed street and, The policeman and the old man are tired. Their faces, in perhaps, something inside Win quietly dying. The passing tight close-up on the television screen, blurred by the crude years became like a physical

weight, pressing her down, film process. The policeman's nerves are close to breaking breaking that rare spirit, transforming her into the stooped point. 'What do you mean, "not of this world"?' The older 12

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man puts a comforting hand on the constable's arm. 'I know shared a roof, now clustered around the television in a sea it's difficult to accept, my boy, but I've encountered these of tartan blankets.

things before. They are the vanguard of an invading force He huffed again at his compatriots. They'd promised to from the planet M...'

stay awake for his programme, they'd promised.

The policeman screams as a huge, scaly claw bursts

'I don't know why I bother,' he said out loud.

through the window. 'Professor! Professor Nightshade! For

'Bother about what?'

God's sake...!' The older man's face zooms into view. Grim It was Jill Mason, the warden of the old people's home, and determined. Fade to black. Thunderous chords bellow sneaking up on him again.

out the familiar theme tune as the word Nightshade is

'Don't do that!' snapped Trevithick. 'Gave me the shock of superimposed on a roll of rather jerky credits.

me life.'

Jill was lifting up cushions and looking under chairs.

Professor Nightshade - Edmund Trevithick

'You haven't seen the Radio Times about, have you, Constable Chorley - James Reynolds Edmund?'

Staff Sergeant Ripper - William Jarrold Trevithick smiled his lopsided smile. He'd hidden the periodical during one of Mrs Holland's fits.

That way no The blue light from the television screen threw garish one would know there was anything else but Nightshade on shadows across Edmund Trevithick's chuckling face as he the television that night.

watched his name flicker by. He smiled, a little indulgently,

'Perhaps Mrs Holland has eaten it.'

and leant forward in his chair to switch off the set. The room

'You're wicked,' said Jill, smiling.

seemed suddenly very dark and quiet. Trevithick cleared She peered out of the window into the darkness and his throat loudly and smiled his famous lopsided smile. It closed the curtains in one decisive movement. It was getting hadn't really dated much at all, even if he did say so himself!

late.

Even so, it had been a good few years since he'd last played Trevithick had to admit that he was fond of the girl, even old Professor Nightshade. Nice of Auntie Beeb, though, to if she was a little patronising at times and wore her hair too give the series a dusting down and a slot on their new long. She'd even taken to sporting false eyelashes (of all second channel.

things) which Trevithick thought resembled copulating Trevithick looked around the room at the circle of elderly insects. He objected less to the length of her skirts which people, all sound asleep; their gentle snores rising and barely reached her shapely knees. Girls had been far too falling in pitch like steam from old copper kettles. He prim in his youth. This bra-burning malarkey certainly had harrumphed loudly, considering himself a sprightly seventy its advantages.

years old and nothing like the poor old dears with whom he He kept his thoughts to himself, however, and steered the conversation back to his old series.

‘We had a lot of trouble with young Jimmy Reynolds.’

Trevithick raised his eyes heavenward. ‘I’ve just been on

‘Mm?’

the television, you stupid old woman. You were too busy

‘Jimmy Reynolds. The lad who played a bobby in this snoring…’

week’s episode. Not long out of drama school, I seem to

‘Eh?’

remember. And a bit fazed by all the lights and excitement.

Mrs Holland had become deaf again as she often did in Of course, it was all live in those days. He was sick in his moments of stress.

helmet just before he went on!’

‘Oh, never mind,’ grumbled Trevithick.

‘Really?’ Jill said distractedly.

‘When’s he on the telly, Jill?’ pleaded the old woman,

‘Queer as a dog’s hind leg as well. We used to call him gripping Jill’s arm. ‘I do so want to see him. Tell me when Debbie Reynolds!’

he’s on.’

Trevithick guffawed into his handkerchief, then looked Jill nodded vigorously and reassuringly, soothing Mrs over at Jill. ‘Oh, you’re as bad as this lot. You don’t care.

Holland back into her chair.

That’s a piece of history you missed tonight.’ Trevithick

‘And let me know when Wilfrid gets home,’ she said adjusted his blanket and huffed again.

finally, drifting back into sleep.

Jill brushed a lock of hair out of her eyes and crossed the

‘Wilfrid?’ said Trevithick with a raised eyebrow.

room to check on Mrs Holland.

‘Her husband.’ Jill tucked the blanket around the old

‘Believe it or not, Edmund…’

woman’s knees. ‘Killed in the First World War, I think.’

‘Mister Trevithick to you, girl.’

‘Hmmph,’ Trevithick grunted. ‘Mad as a hatter. Well, if

‘Believe it or not, I have more important things to do than you’ll excuse me, I think it’s time I got this old body to bed.’

watch you on the TV.’

Jill nodded distractedly and then looked up.

Trevithick grunted. ‘Oh yes? Rather be with your bloody

‘Oh, I almost forgot. I got a phone call today. Someone anarchist friends, would you?’

from the BBC. They want to come up and interview you.’

‘What?’

‘Interview me? Whatever for?’

‘In Paris? Isn’t that the “in thing” for young people Jill pulled a face. ‘Apparently they’ve been flooded with today?’

letters since they started repeating your series. Seems you’re Jill felt a rush of blood to her face. She was silent for a famous all over again.’

while and then said simply, ‘No.’

Trevithick grunted. ‘Probably just amazed I haven’t Mrs Holland, who had slowly woken up, began to cackle dropped dead yet.’

wildly. Her toothless, sunken face reminded Trevithick of

‘Shall I tell them it’s all right then?’

one of those laughing sailor dolls at the seaside.

‘Hmm?’

‘Ooh, Mr Trevithick,’ she cried. ‘When are you on the telly?

‘Shall I tell them it’s OK to send someone up to see you?’

You keep telling us you’re going to be on the telly...’

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Trevithick shrugged non-committally. ‘If you like,’ he said the driving rain which soaked her auburn hair, she spun and left the room.

around, jumped into the air, shouted for Jack to follow her.

Jill sighed. That man was so exasperating!

‘Follow me, Jack! Follow... Follow... Follow me!’

Once in the corridor, however, Edmund Trevithick’s sulky Jack could hear her light, musical laugh resounding in the expression changed. He laughed delightedly and his face air. It was a sound he knew well. There was no mistaking it.

broke out into a beaming, lopsided smile.

The laughter of a delicate, carefree girl he’d once known Famous! All over again!

and loved.

He shambled excitedly to bed.

‘Win!’ he called.

She turned and he could see little beads of rain shining on In the TV room, Jill was trying to ease old Mr Peel into a her lovely young face. She laughed and Jack’s head sitting position. She knew from bitter experience that if she crowded with memories.

couldn’t make him sit upright, his medicine would run like

‘Win!’

syrup down his leathery chin.

He pounded on, his old legs buckling under him. Once or She stopped suddenly and stiffened. There was an odd twice his boots sank completely into the marshy ground and rustling sound coming from outside, as if tree branches corpse-cold water stained the knees of his trousers.

were scraping against the window. But there were no trees

‘Win! You’ve come back!’

that close to the wall. The heavy velvet curtains seemed to She beckoned to him and the old man ran on, his heart in stare at Jill, daring her to open them.

his mouth and his face wreathed with smiles. It was Don’t be scared. You’re a grown woman. What do you impossible. Impossible!

have to fear?

Follow me, Jack. Follow me... Follow... Follow...

Jill swallowed nervously, feeling the back of her throat

‘Wait for me, Win. Wait for me!’

suddenly dry up. Then, grateful that there was no one Win vanished into a little copse of scrubby, stunted trees.

awake to see her, she hurried from the room.

Jack plunged on until he reached the withered foliage which Jack Prudhoe staggered on. He splashed through puddles sheltered an enclave in the rocks too small to be called a in the cobbled square, careered around the post office and cave but large enough for him to stand upright. He pushed finally found himself on the moor path.

aside the sharp branches and peered into the hollow beyond.

The moor. It stretched in front of him in the teeming rain; It was very dark now. Jack’s mind was reeling. Somehow a great, dismal expanse of purple. Billowing clouds, like she was back. The years had been rolled away. Perhaps they strokes of charcoal, lowered over the desolation.

had a chance to start all over again. Win was here. It didn't Jack felt his Wellingtons sink into the sodden ground.

matter how. His beautiful young wife had come back to him.

Ahead of him, still discernible despite the darkness, the girl That was enough.

in the red dress was running. Almost skipping. Oblivious to

'Win?'

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There was silence in the little hollow. Jack looked around, Trevithick dismissed it with a shake of his head, drew the bemused. Then, to his right, he heard a soft, soft rustling curtains and clicked off the bedside lamp. It was good to be sound. Something was emerging from the shadows.

inside and warm when there was such foul weather out Something huge.

there. He looked at the ceiling, his eyelids making a gentle Jack tried to say Win's name but the sound died in his tick-tick as he blinked into the dark. It really was good to be throat as the vast darkness closed around him. No time to inside. Inside the Dalesview Residential Home and away turn and run. No time, even, to scream.

from all that uncertainty. Much as he railed and protested Out on the moor, in the darkness, there was only the and argued, there was a degree of comfort to be derived steady hiss of the rain.

from being an old man in such extraordinary times. Exciting times, to be sure, but frighteningly unstable. Surely it was Trevithick shut the door of his room. He rubbed his hands all going too fast? The certainties of his own young days, the together excitedly and looked at his face in the battered old ethics, the institutions - all seemed to be flooding away like shaving mirror he kept by the bed. 'Not bad,' he said precious wine from an unstoppered bottle. And it scared happily.

‘Not bad at all!’ Those roguish good looks had him.

stood him in good stead in the old Nightshade days. Why not There were wonders, of course. Hadn’t he cheered with again? And after those charming make-up girls had worked the rest when Apollo 7 returned to Earth only a couple of their magic he’d look twenty years younger. Perhaps they months before? Now they were saying man would be on the wanted to make a new series?

moon by next summer! Trevithick huffed to himself. All He undressed carefully, laying his tweed trousers over the well and good, but at what cost? Half the world starving to arm of the chair, and clambered into his soft blue pyjamas.

death. Brave lads pointlessly slaughtered in Southeast Asia.

The Dalesview Residential Home had been converted Bloody bolshy students tearing Paris to bits. Give ‘em a taste from an eighteenth-century farmhouse and still retained its of the birch. That’d teach ‘em. No, it was all going too fast...

deeply inset windows, although the leaded panes had been Much too... fast...

replaced by thick modern glass. Trevithick was always Trevithick felt himself sinking into sleep. Rain drummed reminded of prison-cell windows.

against the window in relentless, sweeping waves. Then He paused to draw the curtains and glanced outside.

there was another sound. Rustling. As if branches were The lashing rain was only visible in the weak yellow light scraping at the thick panes...

of a distant streetlamp. Trevithick started. Something moved through the pool of lamplight into the darkness. He

‘Wake up, Vijay. Vij? Come on, love.’

saw it only for a moment but it felt oddly familiar. A big, Vijay smiled to himself as he heard Holly’s voice but kept crooked, hunched figure. Scuttling like a crab.

his eyes shut all the same. It would be nice to tease her for a 20

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while. The smell of hot coffee tempted him to stir but the Morrison, plucking up the courage to ask her was chair with its fat cushion was so comfortable...

something Vijay hadn't quite pulled off.

'Come on, Vij. If Hawthorne finds you asleep...'

'Missed me?' he asked.

Vijay opened one eye and winked at Holly. She smiled Holly shrugged. 'Suppose so.'

back at him and pushed a mug of steaming coffee into his Vijay smiled but couldn't quite suppress the little twinge hand. Vijay sat up and shuddered, rubbing his shoulders of panic which rose up in him. What if she meant it? What if and back in an effort to wake himself up. 'Happy now?' he she really were indifferent to him?

said, stifling a protracted yawn.

Vijay looked at his reflection in the darkened windows Around them, the great grey room twittered and buzzed and sighed. He'd tried to swing, he really had, growing his with energy. Banks of monitors, scopes and readouts thick black hair to shoulder length and sporting a long, covered every available surface, rising high towards the drooping Lennon moustache. But he felt uncomfortable domed ceiling where a forest of gantries also hummed with with this image. It wasn't Vijay Degun expressing himself, it life.

was Vijay pretending to be something he wasn't in order to Holly was checking one of the smaller screens, a green, impress Holly. Perhaps all those childhood stories about old luminous display speckled with figures and oscillating Imperial England had made him yearn for security and curves. She glanced idly over her shoulder as Vijay stood up normality. Certainly, he'd loved his adopted country with and loosened his tie.

the zeal of a convert, ever since he and his father had

‘If you’re going to snooze, don’t volunteer for night shift.

stepped off the boat in 1951. Now he’d fallen in love with a You know how crucial this stage is.’

wonderful woman who might just regard him as a little Vijay laughed bitterly. ‘Volunteering didn’t really come diversion to help pass the time during the yearlong slog at into it, Holly. When Cooper or Hawthorne say “jump men”

the station. There was so much to discuss. So many hurdles we…’

to be scaled. How could he tell his father he wanted to

‘Drop off to sleep?’

marry a white girl?

‘Very funny.’

Holly turned and gently stroked his cheek.

Vijay sneaked up behind Holly and put his arms around

‘Get some sleep, Vij. I’m not tired. Besides, I’ve got some her waist. Holly craned her neck and gave him a light kiss stuff to work on.’

on the cheek. Vijay grinned.

He almost refused for the sake of chivalry but then They’d been colleagues at the Space Tracking Station for remembered that chivalry wasn’t hip; he nodded, grinned eight months and lovers for four. Vijay had unfashionable and found himself yawning again.

hopes that one day Holly would cease to be Miss Kidd and

‘OK. What time am I on in the morning?’

become Mrs Degun. But, like saying ‘man’ at the end of his He never checked the roster. Holly, who used to find that sentences or admitting that he preferred Peter Noone to Jim infuriating, now thought it rather endearing. She looked at 22

the clipboard which hung on the wall by the main display Vijay, something about staying where nature intended or screens and rubbed the sleep out of her large green eyes.

about parts of London resembling Calcutta.

‘Er... eleven... eleven to nine. Yeah. Same as last Thursday.

Hawthorne’s resentment was firm, clear and diamond Cooper’s on too. Then Hawthorne at four.’

hard. If Mr Wilson had any sense, he used to mutter, he’d

‘Oh, Christ.’

deport the lot of them.

Holly smiled sympathetically. ‘Think yourself lucky. I’ve Holly sighed and looked at the clock. It was two in the got Hawthorne right through Saturday while you’re off morning. She drank a little more coffee and glanced at the enjoying yourself.’

ink tracers which measured the radio waves from the stars Vijay pulled her towards him and kissed her. Around they monitored. The thin line of green ink was straight and them, the instruments whirred and ticked soothingly. Holly unperturbed. They were on the lookout for pulsars, mainly -

wrinkled her freckled nose as Vijay’s moustache brushed this year’s great discovery - sweeping the heavens for likely against it.

sources.

‘Enjoy myself?’ said Vijay, laughing. ‘In this place?’

The ink tracer continued on its placid path. Smooth as a

‘Well, get yourself over to York or somewhere. How about knife through water.

the Brontes’ house?’

Holly went to the window and gazed up at the brilliantly Vijay shrugged. ‘Been there, seen it et cetera. Besides, how lit disc of the radio telescope which towered above the can I enjoy myself if you’re

not around?'

station. There were few stars visible in the murky black sky.

Holly pulled away, blushing a little in spite of herself.

She recognised Gemini and part of Taurus. Then a little of Again that reluctance, thought Vijay, that reticence...

Orion, the constellation on which they were presently

'Go to bed,' said Holly. 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

concentrating. But it rapidly vanished under a blanket of Vijay picked up his lab coat and nodded. He turned as he greasy cloud.

reached the door to the interior. 'Keep smiling.'

Yawning, Holly moved away from the window and, more He disappeared into the darkness.

through a desire to avoid starting work than any real need, Holly sat down in Vijay's chair and rubbed her face. She walked into the corridor to make herself some more coffee.

really did wish Vijay didn't have the day off on Saturday.

Outside, the rain lashed the great parabola of the Dr Hawthorne would be breathing down her neck all day.

telescope, bouncing off into the guttering and cascading Another interminable shift of doubles entendres and down the stained concrete walls of the station.

sarcasm from that nasty, rat-faced man. Always patronising.

Always smiling that sickly smile.

A mile away, in the village, Win Prudhoe spent her first

'You must pay more attention, Miss Kidd, you really night alone in forty years.

must,' said Holly to herself, imitating Hawthorne's funny, high-pitched voice. Then he'd probably get in a dig about 24

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Trevithick awoke with a start. His gaze darted about the his nostrils till he felt the room shuddering and blackening room as he took in the familiar shapes, still enveloped in around him.

thick darkness. The chair with his trousers laid across it and the old wardrobe with the wonky door were still there, but Holly looked at the clock. It was still ten past five. She there was something wrong.

must've looked at the thing a dozen times and there seemed It was only when a sharp gust of freezing air wafted into to be no difference. Clockwatching, she thought. Naughty, his face that Trevithick noticed the window. His heart began naughty.

to slam against his ribs and he felt a great tide of adrenaline Ten past five. December 23, 1968. God, it was nearly pulse unpleasantly to his head.

Christmas. A fact which had totally escaped her until she'd Slowly, with great deliberation, Trevithick folded back the looked at the calendar instead of the clock. The exhausting top blanket and tiptoed softly across the room. He clicked routine at the station had numbed her to the passage of time.

on the light.

Once, she would've been all excited, preparing presents and A huge hole had been smashed in the thick pane of the puddings. But all that was back in Wales with Uncle Louis.

window and the curtains hung in shreds, swinging from the The only festive spirit she could imagine inside Hawthorne broken rail like gibbet corpses. The shattered glass rattled as and Cooper was a couple of glasses of sherry.

a stiff breeze from the moor ebbed and flowed against it.

Holly could remember playing snowballs with her Uncle Trevithick licked his suddenly dry lips and sat down Louis, using a pair of his old pit socks instead of gloves.

heavily in his chair, crumpling the trousers he had so Little bobbles of snow clung to the wool. She'd pulled a face.

carefully laid out. His eyes moved quickly from the

‘They are clean, you know, flower,’ Louis had said, devastation around the window to his bed and then back laughing in his big, barrel-chested way.

again. He could see the pool of yellow light from the same Their breath hung in the air like smoke. After several streetlamp. Nothing there now. He glanced at his old brass snowball fights their hands were red raw and cold as alarm clock. Half past four.

marble. Warming them by the fire induced a delicious And suddenly there was a voice. A shocking, twisted tingling pain, soon sorted out by a little ginger wine. Then rattle of a voice, like dead air expelled from the lungs of a there would be steamy stuffing smells and the King on the drowned man.

radio. The last bits of rationed chocolate left over from the

‘Night... shade...’ it hissed. Chuckling, chuckling.

morning’s gluttony would be consumed as Uncle Louis’

A dreadful smell - a rancid stench like bad meat - blasted tuneless singing drifted in from the kitchen...

through the smashed window. Trevithick felt his head Holly sighed. That was all such a long time ago. It made becoming insanely light, almost as if it were about to leave her think of another Christmas. Her first without James.

his shoulders and fly away. He felt sick and dizzy all at once.

And how Louis had comforted her as she wept into his Then the chuckle came again and the fearful stink rose up in cardigan, orange firelight glowing around them.

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‘It’s all right, Holly, love, it’s all right. Shhh now...’

Holly checked her files and joined Hawthorne.

A klaxon wrenched Holly from her thoughts, its violent

‘Erm… quadrant…’

screech echoing through the station. Holly stood up too

‘Come on, woman.’

quickly and banged her knee against the console.

‘No change. It’s Orion. Same as before, Dr Hawthorne.’

‘Bugger!’

‘You haven’t changed the scan?’

The klaxon wailed at her accusingly. She whirled around, Holly shook her head. Hawthorne whistled. ‘I don’t trying to locate the source of the emergency. The banks of believe this. Get on to Cooper would you?’

lights twinkled on in innocent placidity and the ink-tracer

‘Righto.’

continued to draw its steady line.

‘Where’s Sabu?’

Holly dashed to the window and strained to make out Hawthorne shot a nasty look up at Holly. She took a anything in the gloom. Still the klaxon blared on.

sharp intake of breath, almost wincing at Hawthorne’s Theoretically, it should only be triggered by a breach in the transparent racism.

security fence. Holly swallowed. There was no way she was

‘Vijay’s asleep. I relieved him.’

going out there on her own.

‘Did you now?’

Without warning, the ink-tracer began to oscillate crazily.

Holly ignored him. She turned her attention to a stream of The line broke up, rose and fell, creating an astonishing print-out which was piling at her feet.

pattern of curves and waves in a seizure so rapid that the

'Why's the klaxon going?' she said distractedly.

pen could hardly keep up with it. New information flooded Hawthorne shook his head and tapped a series of figures through the monitors. Screens flared with light and energy.

into the console. 'I don't know. Why don't you find out?'

Dr Hawthorne tumbled into the room, a heavy jumper Holly let out an exasperated sigh and stalked off towards over his pyjamas and his steel-rimmed glasses hanging off the internal phone. Shaun, the new security man, should've the end of his nose. He struggled to get the wire arms reported in by now.

hooked over his ears.

Holly called Dr Cooper, who was none too pleased to be

'Kidd! What the hell do you think...'

woken up, and then Vijay shambled into the room, his face He swung his head towards the ink-tracer and then over slack and drunk with sleep.

to the screen which crackled with data.

'Holly? What's going on?'

'Grief!' he said, swallowing hard. 'Where's all this coming She hugged him, grateful for an ally, and led him back from?'

into the main room.

Holly looked at him dazedly. The klaxon was still blaring

'We're getting massive emissions on the feed. Piles of data.

in her ears.

I've never seen anything like it. Tons of the stuff.'

‘What?’

Vijay shook his head as if to clear it and opened his eyes

‘I said, where’s it coming from? Which quadrant?’

wide.

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‘Why’s the klaxon...?’

Out of the corner of his eye, Vijay saw something move; a Holly turned him towards the double-doored exit and hunched shape scuttling just out of the reach of his torch-patted his backside affectionately. ‘I don’t know. Why don’t beam. He shuddered. There it was again. Just out of sight you find out?’

like a glimpse of summer lightning. He began, Vijay sniffed resignedly and pulled on one of the thick unconsciously, to chew his fingernails.

parkas which hung by the doors. The klaxon’s screech was In the light

from the torch, a huge rent was visible in the beginning to get on his nerves. Why hadn't Shaun done mesh of the fence, the steel wire peeled back like the skin of something about it? It was his job to see to the thing, after all.

an orange.

Privately, Vijay sympathised with the security man. It couldn't be much fun patrolling the perimeter fence every night. Things were so quiet he often wondered why they had security at all.

'It's just that nothing ever happens around here, Mr Degun,' Shaun's predecessor used to say. 'And what's the point of me walking around when we all know that no one would dream of breaking in?'

He'd finally left and gone off to work in an open prison somewhere down south. Very much the same line of work, Vijay thought, smiling.

Vijay opened the doors and stepped out into the hallway.

Within a moment, he was outside. The icy wind blasted him full in the face. Darkness swallowed him whole.

Freezing rain was once again lashing across the moor in great, sweeping waves. There were still a few lights on in

'Shaun?'

the village and Vijay recognised the bedroom light in The His voice sounded feeble and strained. The rain hissed Shepherd's Cross. Distractedly, he wondered whether Betty back at him.

Yeadon was having another of her sleepless nights. There Vijay began to move back towards the station but didn't was a lot of gossip about how ill she'd been looking.

feel able to turn his back on the fence. The wind howled Lawrence, though, never said a word. Just grinned.

through the gaping hole.

Vijay swung round his torch in an arc and the perimeter There it was again. A definite shape this time, bunched up fence loomed into view, gobs of rain splashing off its and knobbly. There was a strange smell too, like bad meat.

barbed-wire top.

Vijay turned up his nose and, without a second thought, ran 30

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back to the station. The darkness seemed to chase him all

‘Well, boys and girls,’ she said. ‘It looks as though our the way like the collapsing walls of a tunnel.

waiting has paid off.’

He pulled open the doors and stumbled gratefully inside.

With theatrical timing, the chattering of the computers The klaxon was still blaring away.

and the scratching of the ink tracers stopped. There was a

‘Can’t we shut that thing up?’ It was Dr Cooper’s voice.

slow, mournful whine as the machinery eased up. The harsh Vijay was grateful she’d arrived, however bad-tempered, lights in the long room flickered briefly and then flared into because she could always keep the loathsome Hawthorne at full life again.

bay. He strode into the control room.

It was over.

‘Well?’ said Hawthorne gruffly.

Cooper laughed. ‘Plenty to get on with, anyway!’

‘The fence has been breached. Great big hole torn in it.’

Vijay slid gratefully into a chair whilst Holly went to the Cooper looked up from the still-chattering computers.

phone. Cooper and Hawthorne were deep in conversation

‘See someone?’

like schoolkids cramming for an exam. There would be time

‘I saw something,’ said Vijay pointedly.

enough, Vijay decided, to get excited about all this. Time Cooper furrowed her brow and dug her hands into her enough. In the morning. He felt his heavy lids closing.

pockets. She was a big, middle-aged woman with cropped, The moor was still solidly shrouded in darkness. Only the steely-grey hair and fearsome blue eyes. There was brilliantly illuminated dish of the telescope, spreading its something very likeable about her no-nonsense manner to chilly glow in a wide circle, was discernible.

which Vijay warmed, although he often felt the rough edge of her tongue.

A good mile away from the station, on the old road which

‘Any sign of Shaun?’ asked Holly. Vijay shook his head.

led to St Hilda’s monastery, Billy Coote was beginning his

‘Well, we might as well turn off the alarm, until we’ve day. He always got up early, even in this weather, folding found out what’s going on. Shall I call the police?’

away the stinking blankets and newspapers which had kept Holly turned off the klaxon and a blessed, peaceful silence him warmish through the long night. He missed the old descended like a blanket of rose petals on to the room.

papers with their heavy broadsheets. The new ones might Cooper nodded absently.

be easier for people to read but they weren’t nearly as good

‘Er... yes, yes, you do that, Holly. We’re all up and about cover. It was a shame more famous people didn’t get shot, now, anyway. Vijay, come over here and log these readings, he thought maliciously. The supplement under which he’d would you? Incredible. I can’t make head nor tail of it.’

slept after Bobby Kennedy kicked the bucket was so thick Vijay slipped off his parka and picked up a sheaf of paper.

he’d hung on to it for weeks.

Dr Cooper turned and beamed at her team like a successful The

soaked, peeling green planks of the old bus shelter football coach.

hadn't been so uncomfortable after all, despite the draughts and the none-too-pleasant smell emanating from the corner.

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But as Billy himself had largely contributed to that, he Morning came slowly to Crook Marsham, the monastery, wasn't about to complain.

the tracking station and, although no one knew it at the time, He rummaged through his straggly grey beard and ran a to the TARDIS, whose old blue paintwork glistened in the hand through the remaining hairs on his sunburnt head.

fine drizzle of new rain.

This was what he liked to call his 'ablutions'.

It was going to be freezing cold again, he could tell, with more rain or maybe even snow on the way. He sniffed the crisp air disdainfully.

In the summertime, he would watch the sun clawing its way over the horizon. He loved the way it came up behind the monastery. Made him feel all spiritual.

Perhaps it was just his wax-clogged ears playing tricks with him but, just at that moment, Billy Coote swore he heard a strangulated, grating whine like rusty chains being dragged across gravel. It seemed to be coming from quite close to the shelter. After a few seconds, the noise died away with a crump like the explosion of a Great War shell, and Billy looked about in confusion. He crept around the side of the bus shelter and peered into the darkness. There was something tall and solid, with a light flashing on top, standing there.

Billy walked out of the shelter and up to the structure which was barely visible in the murky darkness. As he drew closer, however, he recognised the thing as a police telephone box. This came as a great surprise because he was sure it hadn't been there the night before.

Intrigued, he looked the tall blue box up and down, gazed in at the

frosted-glass windows and, after rubbing his grubby hand against the sleeve of his jacket, pressed his palm against one of the doors. He jerked back in shock. It was warm. And it was humming...

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back together again. These days he seemed happier playing scratchy old records on his gramophone than talking to her.

Ace had a thought. She'd never seen inside the Doctor's room. He seemed guarded and defensive whenever the Chapter Two

subject was raised. Would it be full of mementos? Home?

Childhood? Family? Or did the Doctor have too many memories to keep track of? After all, he did claim to be over nine hundred years old. You'd tend to amass quite a bit of junk after all that time.

Not for the first time, she speculated on how the Doctor coped with his frenetic, nomadic existence. On one of the rare occasions when she and her mum hadn't been at each The Doctor, Ace decided, was in need of a change. Not of other's throats, they'd talked about what it must be like to clothes, nor of face (she was beginning to understand live forever.

something of his regenerative powers) but of environment.

'Couldn't bear it, Dory,' her mum had said. 'All those Of late, he had grown irritable and sulky, fond of pacing the friends, all those people you'd love. You'd have to watch console room and the corridors of the TARDIS with hands them all get old and die. And you'd just go on and on. Start thrust deep in pockets, mumbling and sighing. From time to all over again.'

time his bushy eyebrows would twitch and his heavily lined Ace shuddered at the thought. She switched off her tape forehead would crease into a thoughtful frown as if deck and gazed absently about the room. She was a striking inspiration had seized him.

young woman with clear, soft skin and a heart-shaped, Ace had begun

to retreat to her own little room, playing ‘I almost Edwardian face. Her thick brown hair flowed down wanna be adored’ very loudly in the hope of stirring her the back of her T-shirt.

strange companion into some sort of activity, however There were footsteps in the corridor outside. Ace jumped hostile. In all their adventures together she’d never known off the bed and threw open the door. ‘Doctor?’

him so moody and sullen.

Ace glimpsed movement out of the corner of her eye and set off after it.

Having nothing to do, Ace’s mind turned to the drab, She came upon the Doctor in a little room off one of the roundel-indented walls of her own room. She’d never been main arterial corridors. He was lounging on a high, padded one for feathering nests, even back on Earth, and the hectic chair, staring into space. Cold, pale grey light from some pace of her life with the Doctor precluded any thoughts of hidden source reflected off his elfin face.

making a real home in the TARDIS. But they hadn’t been

‘Doctor?’ said Ace in a quiet voice.

anywhere exciting since the Doctor had pulled his old ship 36

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He was wearing a long, muslin nightshirt and a shot-silk seemingly unending stock of bundled papers, scrolls and blue dressing gown, but his legs and feet were bare.

ancient, leather-bound tomes, all tied up with waxed string,

‘Running a bath, Professor?’ said Ace cheerily.

piled against doors or sprawling like paper waterfalls down The Doctor ran a hand through his tousled hair but gave the library’s spiral staircases.

no indication of having noticed Ace’s presence in the room.

‘Books,’ said the Doctor casually.

She began to feel awkward and looked around the grey Reaching a junction point where four roundeled corridors room which was full of dust and yellowing papers. The branched off, the Doctor paused to get his bearings.

Doctor sat amidst it all like some somnolent Buddha.

‘We’ve been this way before,’ sighed Ace.

‘Well, if you’re going to ignore me ...’ she began.

‘What?’ The Doctor’s tone was irritable.

The Doctor looked up at her and fixed her with a

‘We’ve been this way already. I’m sure of it. We’re lost.’

penetrating stare.

The Doctor bristled. ‘Lost? Me! I know this ship like the

‘What do you say to a bit of exploring?’

back of... the back of...’ He gazed distractedly up and down Ace was relieved. ‘Anything’s better than just hanging the corridor, ‘... beyond.’

around inside the TARDIS.’

Ace rolled her eyes and plunged her hands into her Levis.

‘Good, good. I think... I think I can promise you

‘Maybe we should’ve left a trail like that Greek bloke with something a little recherché.’

the minah bird.’

‘Re... what?’

‘Minotaur,’ said the Doctor, sucking his finger. ‘Anyway, But the Doctor was on his feet and off down the corridor we’re not lost, I’ve found it.’

without another word. Ace shrugged and walked after him,

‘Found what?’

but he was covering ground at such an extraordinary rate Just to one side of them was a large, pearl-grey door, that she found herself racing to keep up with the little man.

indented with the usual roundel pattern but possessed of a

‘Where are we going, Professor?’

big, old-fashioned doorknob.

‘There’s something I want you to see,’ the Doctor called The Doctor bent down a little and slowly, almost over his shoulder.

reverently, opened the door.

And so they plunged deeper and deeper into the heart of Ace stepped back a little as a wave of icy air hit her face.

the TARDIS, taking in more shuttered rooms, alcoves and Then another sensation seemed to steal over her. A deep niches than Ace had seen in her short life. There were and profound stillness. She was reminded of her first visit to occasional delights and surprises: a big red room entirely church as a child when the sense of ritual and holiness full of hats, a patch of what appeared to be open almost overwhelmed her.

countryside (which she could only presume the Doctor The room beyond the door had six crumbling stone walls, reserved for picnics) and a glimpse of the vast, mahogany-their solid roundels dappled by a warm green light. In the panelled TARDIS library. Ace stared in disbelief at the centre stood a massive granite console, elaborately carved 38

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like a Gothic altar. Nests of tiny, winking instrumentation The Doctor said nothing.

crowded its pillars and panels.

Ace turned her attention to the rest of the room. In a corner, where clumps of wisteria were winding their way up the wall, she discovered a full-length mirror mounted on a beautiful ebony stand. She grinned at herself in the mottled silver surface.

Hanging from and scattered about the old mirror were masses of clothes. This must be some of the Doctor's centuries of junk, thought Ace. She glanced over at him but he was absorbed in his work. Shrugging, she picked up a few garments and held them in front of her.

There was a big brown duffel coat of the type the Doctor was fond of wearing, a thick donkey jacket, a funny red thing which looked like a Roman toga (and probably was), several pairs of gloves, five collapsible opera hats and a tweed waistcoat splashed and stained with green ink.

Ace pulled a face. Then her eyes alighted on a rather drab

‘It’s like sitting at the bottom of a swimming pool,’ she grey tunic. There was a little badge embroidered on the said, gazing at the arched ceiling in awe.

apron and Ace smiled as she recognised it. As quickly as The Doctor was already busy at the console, checking that possible, she struggled into the garment and turned to face the antiquated machinery was still operational.

the Doctor.

‘It has a certain charm, I suppose,’ he said grudgingly.

‘Ta, da!’ she announced happily.

‘But it always seemed too tucked away for ready use.’

‘Hmm?’

‘What is it?’

Ace smiled hopefully. ‘Gross, isn’t it?’

‘Tertiary console room. Not bad, eh?’

The Doctor’s face set in a rigid frown.

‘Not bad? It’s beautiful!’

‘Take it off,’ he said in a quiet, dangerous voice.

The Doctor seemed to be warming to his theme which

‘What?’

pleased Ace immeasurably.

‘Take it off.’ snapped the Doctor, swinging back to the

‘Oh yes,’ he said, fussing over the console, ‘a little spatial console.

relocation and we can call this...’

Ace stared dumbly at the Doctor’s back. She took off the He paused and began to stare into space again.

tunic in embarrassed silence and laid it down carefully by

‘Home?’ volunteered Ace.

the mirror.

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‘Sorry,’ she said in a hoarse whisper.

The Doctor was all smiles now. What the hell was the The Doctor’s back remained obstinately turned towards matter with him?

her.

A picture began to form on the scanner but it was vague

‘If you don’t want me to muck about, Professor…’

and hazy.

‘Doctor! I’m the Doctor! How many times do I have to tell

‘Reception’s not so hot but then she hasn’t been used in you, you stupid girl?’

ages. Just getting used to it, I expect.’

Ace recoiled as if she’d been struck. The Doctor hovered It was obviously dark outside but Ace could make out a by the console a moment, his face flushed with emotion, bleak, blasted landscape of moor and heather.

then he stalked from the room, his dressing gown trailing

‘Uggh.’

behind him.

‘Quite,’ said the Doctor. ‘Cold, wet and dark but at least Ace could feel a rising, numb pain in her throat and hands.

you’re home.’

Familiar symptoms for the onset of tears. Familiar Ace looked at him. ‘Home?’

symptoms which she’d convinced herself she’d outgrown.

‘Earth at any rate. Twentieth century. North of England.

No! she said to herself, angrily. No tears. Don’t give him Plus a continuous precipitation of condensed oxygen and the satisfaction of seeing you cry. If he wants to treat you hydrogen compound.’

like this, that’s his business.

‘Meaning?’

She sat down on the stone-flagged floor and gently

‘Meaning it’s chucking it down. Fetch another brolly, fingered the drab grey tunic. The embroidered badge stood would you?’

out in red and gold: COAL HILL SCHOOL.

A few moments later they stepped outside into the That was the place where they’d had that run in with the darkness. In front of the TARDIS stood the rickety structure Daleks. So why was the Doctor so upset about that? And of the old bus shelter, recently home to Billy Coote, who what was he doing with one of the uniforms anyway?

was now pelting like a madman towards Crook Marsham.

In an amazingly short space of time, the Doctor returned, Over towards the east, the old monastery was etched now dressed in a chocolate-brown belted coat, russet against the threatening sky and the tracking station loomed waistcoat and checked trousers. Ace, feeling suddenly chilly, like a behemothal saucer out of the purple heather.

had struggled into the donkey jacket.

The Doctor put up his umbrella, plonked his hat

‘Very fetching!’ said the Doctor enthusiastically, as if gracelessly on to his head and walked a little way forward nothing at all had happened. He spotted the brown duffel to where a faded wooden road sign protruded like a coat on the floor and put it on. Ace glanced at the far wall as lightning-struck tree from the sodden ground.

a roundel glowed into colourful life.

‘Crook Marsham: one mile.’ He turned to Ace and smiled.

‘Scanner?’ she said, shakily.

‘How about breakfast?’

‘Yes. Neat, isn’t it?’

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The great black prow of the ship lurches sickeningly.

Was it raining back there? He’d have liked to have seen There are already men in the water. Water like tar. Black, the Minster in the rain again.

dreadful, fathomless.

Something tugging at his leg. A sharp, clear cold pain like A flare smashes into the sky and for a moment everything frozen needles. Blood pooling to the surface. And then the is clear. Stark. Vividly white.

panic rising and his gorge rising as he sees the triangular fin Men in the sea. Life-boats. Empty life-jackets. The bulk of break the water and circle. Circle.

the ship slips under the waves. A mass of frothing foam as Alfred Beadle. Screaming. Screaming for someone. The the sea covers her gun turrets. Then the awful, chilling shark pulling blindly at him. Going down. Going under.

moan as the protesting metal buckles and snaps. Panels Arms slipping under the life-belt. Pulling. Screaming for burst. Black water floods her engines.

Betty. Salt water in his mouth. But soon it’ll be over. Please And then there is screaming. Men in white sweaters.

Christ make it soon. Water in his eyes. Stinging. His hair Freezing. Saturated. Screaming as the ship's pull drags them spreading like weed under the water. Betty... Betty...

under. Young faces blanched white by the flare. A few boats Remember me, Betty...

left. The tall turret of the U-boat slips under the water, its job done.

'Betty, love. Are you all right?'

Silence. Men bobbing slowly in their Mae Wests. Most of Lawrence Yeadon clicked on the bed-side lamp and put them dead already, their faces turned down as if in an arm around his wife who was sitting bolt upright in bed.

penitence. Some are still alive, kicking their submerged feet.

Her nightie was soaked in sweat and there was an awful, The great cold, marble-smooth expanse of the ocean is haunted look in her red-rimmed eyes.

revealed as dawn comes.

'Betty?'

Alfred Beadle. Thinking of home. Thinking of his mum She turned and looked distractedly at her husband. Then and dad back in York, and Betty, his younger sister. Alfred she nodded, slowly and deliberately. 'I'm all right.'

Beadle, not yet nineteen, feeling the freezing water numbing Lawrence eased her back on to the pillow.

his body. Staring out at a dozen of his comrades floating

'Another dream?'

silently by...

She nodded again and reached for the little brown bottle Jackie Barrett, his big face turned towards the sky, quite of pills which stood on the cabinet.

dead. Eddie Turnbull. Always smiling. Always joking.

'Your Alf again?' asked Lawrence.

Slipping under the waves as his life eases away.

She popped a couple of pills into her mouth and managed Alfred Beadle. Thinking of home. Would Betty be making to swallow them.

tea right now? He could do with some tea. Steaming hot.

‘Yes. Alf again.’ Her voice was dry as paper.

Strong and orange like it was on Sundays in his mum’s best china.

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Lawrence sighed and switched off the lamp. The light of corridor and tossed them into the washing basket by the morning was already insinuating itself into the room. He bathroom. Domestic things. Robin’s washing. Lawrence’s put his hands behind his head and looked at the ceiling.

washing. That’s what she needed to do. Comforting

‘You can’t go on blaming yourself you know, love.’

domestic things. Something mundane to keep her mind off How many times had he said that to her?

it.

Betty Yeadon turned on to her side. She swallowed and Betty entered the tap room of the pub. It stank of stale tried to get a little saliva into her mouth. She couldn’t close beer and cigarette smoke. She found a glass, helped herself her eyes. If she did, she would see him again. Or what the to a triple measure of whiskey and selected a seat by the sharks left of him. Bobbing in the water, his skin blanched window. It was the same seat in which Jack Prudhoe had and his eyes pecked out by gulls. The way the rescue ship supped his solitary pint the afternoon before.

had found him.

Betty glanced at the tatty Christmas decorations pinned

‘I might as well get up,’ she said, glancing at the clock. It across the bar and began to cry.

was nearly half past eight. 23 December.

Lawrence closed his eyes. He felt terrible. They’d already The Doctor was in voluble mood despite the driving rain been woken up once during the night by the siren from that and had discoursed on a variety of subjects, including bloody telescope on the moor. And now another of Betty’s Gothic architecture, his favourite angling flies and the nightmares. Something would have to give sooner or later.

importance of a clean collar, by the time he and Ace Betty slipped on her dressing gown and padded down the wandered into Crook Marsham.

hall. She could hear her stepson, Robin, snoring gently in his It was getting light at last and the hotchpotch of houses room. Then his alarm clock clattered into life and she heard and shops became distinct as they advanced up the main his frantic efforts to disable it. He moaned.

street.

Placing her hand on the door, Betty closed her eyes and

‘Bit bleak, isn’t it, Doctor?’

breathed deeply. It was as if she were drawing strength and The Doctor was gazing across the street at a rather comfort from Robin’s presence. She opened her eyes and dilapidated Saxon church.

saw Nobby Stiles grinning toothlessly between her fingers.

‘Bleak? No, no. It’s characterful, Ace, characterful. Just Robin’s giant poster of the World Cup winners stared at her, look at that church. Eighth century, I believe, with Norman unseeing.

and Victorian additions. Look at the crenellations!’

Suddenly feeling a fool, she pulled her hand away and Ace grimaced. She couldn’t stand it when he became walked off down the corridor.

enthusiastic.

A pair of football socks, stiff with sweat, lay discarded on

‘Didn’t you say something about breakfast?’

the carpet like mummified earthworms. Betty picked them up and rolled them into a ball. She continued down the 46

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The Doctor sighed and turned away from the church. He Robin apologised again and then pedalled away like a spun his umbrella round like a water-dowser and pointed madman. Ace watched him go all the way.

towards The Shepherd’s Cross.

‘Ace?’

‘Bit early in the day, isn’t it?’

Robin’s slim form vanished around the corner and on to The Doctor grinned. ‘Mmm, with the sun not even the moor track.

remotely over the yardarm! ... Actually, I was thinking they

‘Ace!’

might be serving refreshment of some sort. The TARDIS

‘Hmm?’

food-dispensers are all very well but sometimes you just

‘If you’re still interested in breakfast ...?’

can’t beat a decent British cuppa.’

Ace shook her head as if to clear it and smiled. ‘Yeah, of There was an upstairs light on but no sign of life.

course.’

Suddenly, in a flurry of scarf, coat and bicycle, a young man The Doctor set off towards a flickering neon café sign came hurtling around the side of the pub, almost running about a hundred yards

away. Ace followed close behind the Doctor down.

him, her head sunk thoughtfully on her breast.

‘God, sorry. Are you OK? I’m a bit late for work. Are you

‘I wonder if we’re anywhere near Durham. Have you ever sure you’re all right?’

seen the cathedral?’ asked the Doctor.

‘I’ll live,’ said the Doctor, brushing himself down.

‘No,’ said Ace distantly.

Robin jumped back on to his bike and grinned at Ace.

‘You should, you know, you really should. Of course I

‘I wonder if you can help us, young man?’

remember the day it was finished ...’

‘Surely.’

Ace looked up from her thoughts and smiled. She never

‘We’d like to know whether this fine establishment is knew whether the Doctor’s tales were serious or not. At any open for some breakfast just yet?’

rate, he certainly seemed to have snapped out of his Ace found that she was staring at Robin as he spoke to the depression. If anything, he now seemed a little too chatty.

Doctor. There were disconcerting but very nice tinglings Almost as if he were trying to hide something...

moving through her body.

Ace frowned.

‘Fraid not,’ said Robin. ‘Mum’s just up but the pub doesn’t open till eleven.’

Edmund Trevithick blinked into wakefulness. There was a He was tall and slim with thick black hair and skin as band of cold winter sunlight

streaming across his bed. He smooth as soapstone. His eyes were an extraordinary green blinked again. For a moment he couldn't remember where and his smile broad and cheeky.

he was. There was some fugitive memory prodding at his

'Try the café up the road,' he advised. 'Cheap and subconscious.

cheerful but it does the job.'

Lying there in the bed by the window, Trevithick began to

'Thank you very much,' said the Doctor.

think of his childhood. He remembered seeing the intense, 48

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thrilling white reflection off newly fallen snow as it peeked abstraction by the orange light of the fire. His father helped through the chinks in the curtains. And the joy of throwing him write out his list for Santa Claus and then tossed the back the heavy drapes to expose the acres and acres of land small square of paper on to the fused knot of red hot coal. It behind his father's parsonage, knee deep in wonderful snow.

spun briefly in the column of hot air, became temporarily His father (a completely different sort of chap out of transparent - he could see writing on both sides at once -

church) would get into his 'civvies' and root out the old and vanished up the chimney.

wooden sled from the outhouse. Then they would be off, Then there would be tall tales from his father about Edmund, his father and Edmund's elder brother Maurice, winters so severe that houses vanished under drifts and speeding down the hill, bumping and smashing into little match flames froze as they were struck.

mounds of impacted snow or bruising their backsides on That was back at the turn of the century. Then he'd seen unexpected clumps of stubble, which protruded like yellow really bad winters. The one in '47... and '63, only five years bristles from under the drifts.

ago. That had caught him short. He'd never last another one The latter part of the year had always been his favourite.

of those if it came, especially with the ancient heating in the Better by far than the long, depressing summer evenings Dalesview Home.

which stretched out like flavourless chewing gum. Better A bad smell, like rotting fish, dragged him back from his than the dull, in-between months with no special character.

memories into reality. It was the same smell from the night No, the end of the year it was, with the deliciously long run-before. Trevithick sat up in bed and looked around. The in through the burnt turnip smells of Hallowe'en and dark sight of the shattered panes and billowing curtains brought smoke of November into the crisp, freezing, perfect-sunned back his experiences in a rush of remembrance. He days of early December.

swallowed hard and pressed the buzzer which would And then Christmas! One huge red and green memory, summon Jill.

packed to bursting with sensual delights. Pulled by his Jill Mason glared at the buzzing light by her bed. Edmund mother's hand into palatial department stores like castles of again. Was he never content? She knew already that ice: twinkling lights, the hum of extortionately priced train-whichever side of the bed she chose to get out of would be sets, the exciting smell of unfamiliar perfume, all mingling the wrong side. She'd slept badly and was in a rather foul and bursting before his astonished little eyes. Going into mood. Trevithick's remarks of the previous night had these stores in daylight and the fantastic shock of emerging touched a raw nerve. Yes, she would rather be with those into wintry darkness - the reversal of the disappointment he

'bloody anarchists' in Paris than rot in this dismal corner of felt coming out of a cinema into painful sunshine.

England. She'd received an exciting letter from an old Trevithick recalled sitting with his father and brother in a university friend only the other day, extensively detailing wonderfully dark front room that smelled of tangerines.

the French students' pitched battles with the police on the Dark as pitch. The corners of the room softened into Rive Gauche. It had been a magical summer, her friend 50

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assured her, getting stoned with her strange and interesting The Doctor and Ace had taken Robin's advice and were new French lover, trying to 'find herself' by looking inward.

now warmly ensconced in Mrs Crithin's delightful café, a Jill felt an almost painful sense of missing out on pleasantly cluttered room of red plastic upholstered seats something huge and important. She should've been there and tarnished cappuccino urns. There was a heavy, greasy too, challenging reactionaries like de Gaulle and Johnson smell of bacon fat coupled with the not unpleasant blue just as she had at university, not locked up in an old folk's haze of Mrs Crithin's eighth cigarette of the morning.

home. Sometimes she felt more of an invalid than her On the wall, Ace had found a calendar which, along with charges.

Mrs Crithin's splendidly boisterous decorations, told her it Trevithick's light buzzed. Jill sighed and threw on a was almost Christmas. Christmas 1968.

heavily creased dressing gown. She padded down the She felt a little thrill run through her. So here she was at corridor and threw open Trevithick's door.

last. The real sixties. Not '63 where she'd seen little of

'What is it, Edmund?' she yawned. 'Because if it can wait England except Coal Hill School and the Daleks, but '68: I'd appreciate it. It's not time for breakfast yet and Polly has time of the Beatles and the Stones, Martin Luther King and her hands full with Miss Norton's drip...'

the Mexico Olympics, the Paris Riots and man on the moon.

Trevithick didn't say a word. Instead he simply pointed at No, that was '69, wasn't it?

the window like some dying medieval bishop catching sight All she'd known of this time was her mum's enthusiasm of the Grim Reaper.

and the evidence of faded home movies. Yet even these Jill rubbed a hand across sleep-misted eyes and turned silent figures in vibrant colours mouthing and waving on round. The sight of the smashed window turned her cold.

warm beaches seemed to have something of the era's She remembered the time her flat was burgled and how indefinable presence about them. Ace's mum with high, she'd thrown up at the sight of devastation. But it wasn't the lacquered hair and garish mini-dress laughing as Uncle financial loss, or even the mess, which had upset her. Rather Harry goosed her from behind. Harry's mint-green Hillman it was the sense of invasion; the idea that some stranger had Minx with its Batmobile tail-fins gliding into the distance as ploughed through her private things, destroyed the sanctity the family waved him away. All this to the achingly of her little nest.

comforting trill of the film projector.

She felt the same thing now and the same desire to vomit.

The Doctor returned from the counter with two mugs of Trevithick looked at her, a little fear in his eyes.

steaming tea. It was nice and warm inside the café and Ace Jill then became aware of another sensation. An insistent, took off her donkey jacket with some relief.

pungent smell wafting from the shattered window. It was

'Ta,' she said and took a deep draught of tea. It was a little like bad meat. Or the rancid smell of a dead animal in the too hot and burned the roof of her mouth.

road...

The Doctor was staring into the middle distance, his inky black eyes distracted and fathomless. He drank some tea 52

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almost without thinking. Ace decided it was best to keep The Doctor sighed and gazed past her again, his eyes quiet. Mrs Crithin's tranny

played a song which Ace could seeing different places, different people, different times ... ‘I remember Uncle Harry humming in his familiar way. It wonder if I’m not being a selfish old Time Lord. Keeping drifted across the café as Mrs Crithin mopped up some you from better things.’

spilled tea.

‘But Doctor, you’re all I’ve got! I don’t want anything else.

‘Those were the days, my friend. We thought they’d never Not yet. Where else could I go?’

end. We’d sing and dance for ever and a day ...’

The Doctor put up his hands. ‘It’s all right, it’s all right.

Quite suddenly, the Doctor seemed to snap out of it and I’m not about to abandon you. I just thought... perhaps...

fixed Ace with his most charming smile.

perhaps it’s time to stop all this aimless wandering. That’s

‘Well, Ace,’ he mused, rubbing his finger around the rim all.’

of the mug, ‘how are you keeping?’

Ace nodded slowly. She’d been right then.

It was such an odd question that Ace was momentarily

‘I’m not daft, Doctor. You’re talking about yourself, aren’t taken aback. It was the sort of thing old aunts or distant you?’ she said, cocking an eyebrow. The Doctor looked at cousins ask just before they remember they haven’t seen her in mock indignation and then his rumpled face you since you were knee high to a grasshopper.

collapsed into a resigned frown. ‘Yes. I’m talking about

‘What d’you mean? You see me every day.’

myself.’

The Doctor smiled, but it was a thin smile. ‘I know, I It had begun to rain again and Mrs Crithin switched on know. But I mean ... how are you? Really. In yourself.’

the dirty-yellow lights to brighten things up. Sheets of rain Ace frowned.

lashed against the big, plate-glass window. There was a

‘Oh, I’m not putting this very well, am I?’ said the Doctor, quality of stillness in the air too, as in before a thunderstorm.

absently rummaging through the pockets of his duffel coat.

Ace suddenly felt like a priest at confession.

‘What I’m trying to find out is… well… whether you’re

‘Go on,’ she said quietly. The Doctor bowed his head and happy. Whether you don’t think it’s time to put down a few gazed at his mug of tea. In the garish artificial light he roots.’

seemed much older, the lines on his wise face like the Ace was shocked. The Doctor was full of surprises. She carving on some ancient crusader’s tomb effigy.

had a vague impression, too, that he was really thinking

‘It’s just that… I’ve been thinking lately… and if I’ve been aloud, trying to vocalise a debate obviously raging inside difficult, then I’m truly sorry. Thinking… whether I’ve really his own head.

done any good. All these years… all these years of roaming

‘What are you on about, Doctor?’ She drank another gulp about. Righting wrongs. Interfering…’

of tea. The burnt skin on the roof of her mouth was Ace felt an upsurge of tenderness inside her. ‘But how can beginning to throb.

you say that, Doctor? You know you’ve done good. The 54

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whole world… Well, everyone is in your debt a hundred up and give them a quick turn around the Universe but they times over. You know that.’

all go in the end. And I'm left... ultimately alone.'

'But have I the right to take it upon myself? To act as self-Ace found herself blinking back tears. He's just like the appointed judge and jury?' The Doctor looked Ace in the rest of us, she thought.

eye.

'Let me get this straight, Doctor. Are you talking about

'You know you've done good,' she said, feeling that her retiring?'

attempt at reassurance was hopelessly inadequate.

The Doctor smiled. 'I suppose I am, yes. Settling down

'Have I, Ace? Have I?'

somewhere. For a few centuries at least. Somewhere away Ace looked away. Mrs Crithin was attempting to change from death and disaster. Far from the madding crowd.'

the station on her tranny.

'But where?'

The Doctor rested his cheek on one hand and his deeply Privately, Ace thought the Doctor was incapable of living lined face rucked up against his fingers like ripples in sand.

a quiet life, like that old woman in the Agatha Christie

'I'm so tired,' he said with a heavy sigh. His eyes flicked books. Wherever she goes, people get bumped off.

up at Ace. 'I've been thinking a lot lately. About the past.

'Perhaps it's time I went home. To Gallifrey.'

About my past, I mean.'

Ace was amazed. 'But you're always telling me what a Ace suddenly remembered the incident with the grey dull hole it is. All those geriatrics swarming around doing tunic in the tertiary console room. The Doctor nodded as if nothing all day. Isn't that why you left in the first place?'

he'd read her thoughts.

'One of the reasons.'

'Yes. The uniform. It was Susan's.'

'So what's changed?' said Ace.

Ace's ears pricked up. 'Girlfriend?'

'I have. I mean... all these years of poking my nose into The Doctor laughed almost scornfully. 'She was my first other people's business. Perhaps I should try and sort things travelling companion. We were... we are from the same out back there. It's corrupt and it's a bureaucratic nightmare planet. I enrolled her in that school when I came to Earth but its heart is in the right place. I think it's time I stopped with the Hand of Omega. We saw so much in our time shirking my responsibilities.'

together. But she left me. As they all do. As you will... And For once in her life, Ace could think of absolutely nothing do you know, Ace, I don't think a day passes when I don't to say.

think of her.'

The café door burst open and a tall Asian man with

'What are you trying to say, Doctor?'

shoulder-length black hair strode inside. Ace was struck by He shrugged. 'I miss her, I suppose. I miss... my family. In the appealing openness of his finely sculpted face but whatever sense of the word. There've been so many over the thought it a shame he masked his features with such an ugly years. Ian and Barbara. Sarah. Jo. Dear Jamie... I whisk them moustache.

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Vijay Degun ran his fingers through his soaking hair and

'I need some time to myself. To do some thinking. I was grinned at

Mrs Crithin behind the counter. ‘Could I use wondering - well...’

your phone, Mrs Crithin? We had a bit of an emergency up Ace smiled. ‘Here’s two bob, get yourself to the pictures?

at the station last night and it blew all our phone lines. I Yeah, I understand, Doctor. I’ll occupy myself for a bit.

need to get through to Cambridge.’

Where will you be?’

Ace looked out of the window and noticed the big green The Doctor stood up and put on his hat. ‘I’m going to that Land Rover in which Vijay had arrived.

monastery over on the moor. Good places to think,

‘There’s a phone box down the road, you know, love,’

monasteries.’

said Mrs Crithin, ‘but you’re welcome to use mine.’

‘OK, Doctor.’

‘I tried that one but it’s out of order as well.’

‘I’ll see you in The Shepherd’s Cross this evening. Shall Mrs Crithin frowned and led Vijay into the back of the we say eight o’clock? Sorry to leave you in the lurch like café. Ace looked at the Doctor but he seemed disinterested this.’

and deep in thought. She crept up to the counter and leaned

‘Eight o’clock, in the pub. Got you. Are you buying?’

across. Vijay was just visible in a little alcove under the The Doctor grinned, gripped her arm affectionately and stairs, fiddling with the receiver of Mrs Crithin’s phone. He stepped out into the rain. Ace watched his little figure, frowned and tapped the instrument against his cupped blurred by the downpour, as he walked out of the village.

hand. Something was wrong. He talked to Mrs Crithin for a She sighed heavily.

few minutes and then ran back into the café.

Now what was she going to do? She had enough trouble

‘Thanks anyway,’ he called behind him. ‘All the lines keeping herself occupied in the middle of London, never must be down. Probably the weather!’

mind in this hole. And this might be 1968 but she doubted He almost ran into Ace as he barged towards the door.

whether Crook Marsham ever did much swinging. Still,

‘Oh sorry,’ he said, his eyes already looking beyond Ace there were compensations. That lad on the bike for one. She to the door. He paused on the threshold and the rain smiled.

buffeted him. Then, wrapping his overcoat around him, he There was a long-drawn-out grumbling noise and Ace dashed from the café towards The Shepherd’s Cross.

looked down at her stomach. Breakfast was a good place to

‘Did you hear that, Doctor?’ said Ace excitedly.

start. She went up to the counter and beamed at Mrs Crithin.

‘Mmm?’

‘Three egg sandwiches and another cup of tea, please.’

‘All the phone lines are down. We’re cut off!’ Ace tried to sound bubbly in the hope of cheering the Doctor up.

‘Betty?’

‘Er... Ace,’ he said in a quiet voice, ‘I was wondering

‘Mm?’

whether I could ask you a favour.’

‘Customer, love.’

‘Yeah, of course. Anything.’

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Lawrence Yeadon put down his tea towel and took his Betty slipped off her shoes and walked across the thickly wife's hand.

carpeted hallway to the bathroom. She turned on the tap

'Are you sure you're all right?'

and gorgeously hot water thudded into the pink porcelain.

Betty smiled thinly at him. Her eyes were misting over. It A few drops of syrupy bath oil completed the process and was obvious she hadn't yet recovered from the night's tears.

Betty felt a thrill of happy anticipation at the prospect of a

'I'm all right. Honestly, Lol.'

restful soak. She stayed to watch the bubble bath froth from Lawrence shook his head and moved to serve the old man under the taps and then returned to the bedroom.

who was impatiently tapping his ring finger against his empty beer glass.

A mile away, at the tracking station, Dr Hawthorne stood

'I'll serve Mr Medcalfe. You go and lie down.'

up sharply as a fresh burst of data stormed through the Betty protested but Lawrence held up his hand. 'Quite room, sending computers and tracers haywire. He dashed to apart from the fact that I'm worried about you, you're not the internal phone in order to alert Dr Cooper. The line was exactly presenting the image of barmaid of the month dead. He cursed and ran from the room.

looking like that, are you?'

Betty shook her head, defeated.

Betty took off her clothes with careful deliberation, as if

'Now go on. Have a nap. You'll feel better for it.'

she were engaged in some sort of ritual. The towelling In truth, Betty was glad to leave the smoky bar and be bathrobe which she put on had been a present from alone with her thoughts. Robin wouldn't be back from work Lawrence's sister Margie. It was a little too big but the for a couple of hours and the upstairs of the pub was freshly laundered, fluffy material made her feel warm and pleasantly quiet and warm. Betty glanced around the corner secure.

of Robin's bedroom and smiled at the devastated jumble of She still couldn't keep her mind off Alf. His image seemed clothes and bedsheets. Not a stickler for neatness like his to hover before her eyes like a projected film. She walked to dad or his Uncle Alf.

the bathroom and stopped dead.

Alf. Betty thought of her brother again and tears pricked Under the frothy foam, seemingly deep, deep down in the her eyes. She fondled the silver photo frame which she kept water, something was moving.

on her dressing table. Auntie Jean and her mum, grinning Panic and a scream began to rise in her throat. A hand falsely at a camera on some faraway summer holiday. Black was fumbling its way out of the water: a vile, filthy hand, its and white seagulls circled in a black and white sky.

flesh sunburnt and blistered, black scum and mould under Why couldn't she stop thinking about Alf? He'd been its fingernails. And as it grasped the side of the bath, and an dead for over twenty years. Guilt hung about her neck like equally appalling body hauled itself out, Betty let go of her an albatross.

senses and slipped gratefully into a dead faint.

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Chapter Three

The Doctor held his umbrella like a shield before him as a fresh squall of rain tore across the moor. His feet squelched into the deep tracks which already pocked the moor path, The thing in the bath hauled itself to its feet, sending their muddy outlines pooling with glutinous brown water.

water cascading on to the floor. It was a man, or the remains He paused briefly and fumbled in his pockets as the wind of a man, wearing a dark blue uniform and a filthy white flapped his coat against him. Pushing the umbrella under sweater. The hair was lank and hung in a great wet slap one arm he pulled on a pair of thick woollen gloves and over the mottled, fish-flesh white forehead. The lips were wrapped his paisley scarf tightly around his neck.

pulled back in a ghastly grin of decay beneath two empty, It was terribly, bitingly cold and the Doctor could feel an empty sockets, speckled and rimmed with black blood. In aching numbness spreading across his exposed cheeks. He her shock, Betty could have been forgiven for not screwed up his eyes and peered at the gaunt tower of the recognising the creature. But, in point of fact, over twenty monastery, now less than half a mile away, silhouetted years late, her brother Alf had come home to stay...

against the gun-metal sky. Sniffing as a drew-drop formed on the end of his nose, the Doctor clapped a hand on his hat to prevent the wind from whipping it away.

His mind buzzed with a million conflicting thoughts but, in a cocoon of coats, the Doctor resolved to think only of his pressing need for warmth, comfort and a strong cup of tea.

He marched on, unwittingly ghosting the large, Wellington-indented tracks of Jack Prudhoe.

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Ace looked into her empty cup and then at her watch. It

‘Who?’

was past eleven and she was still Mrs Crithin’s only

‘That Sharon Tate,’ trilled Mrs Crithin. ‘I think she’s ever customer of the day. The woman herself was engaged in a so good. And it’s nice to see them still as much in love.’

seemingly endless rota of table-mopping and washing up.

Sharon Tate? Ace’s memory pulled up sharp at the She’d exchanged a few words with Ace, mostly about the naggingly familiar name. It was tied up somewhere in a

‘shocking

weather’.

And

wasn’t

it

awful

about

kaleidoscope of images and half-recalled conversations.

Czechoslovakia? Ace had nodded with some gravity even Then she had it. Sharon Tate: the beautiful wife of Roman though she hadn’t a clue what Mrs Crithin was talking Polanski, gruesomely murdered at the behest of Charles about.

Manson and his ‘family’ of West Coast fanatics. Ace had Finally, the ever-smiling café owner had plonked her read about it in one of her mum’s grisly True Crime books.

newspaper on to the table and Ace seized upon it, ravenous The title was something like The Day the Dream Died.

for distraction.

Ace looked into Mrs Crithin’s eyes and felt suddenly It was strangely fascinating to see what was to her old uncomfortable with her knowledge of the future, like some news presented on brand-new,

creamy paper. Odd, she ancient seer cursed with the gift of prophecy. She changed thought, that the reality of time travel with the Doctor really the subject with what she hoped was some nonchalance.

struck her only when she had a personal handle on it. Only

'What's your flying saucer thing up the road, then?'

a few hundred miles from where she now sat, her mum Mrs Crithin stopped mopping and put her hand on her would be doing some of those things about which she was ample hip as if settling into a familiar routine. 'That's our always reminiscing. Maybe planning which outfit she telescope, love. Famous in the right circles. We have all sorts would wear and which of her fancy-men she would favour.

trooping up there. It picks up radio messages from outer Perhaps, on the dance floor of some sweaty, swinging space so I keep a table reserved in case we ever get any little nightclub, meeting the man with whom she would soon green men.'

conceive little Dorothy. Little Dorothy felt herself shudder.

Ace grinned. 'And who was that bloke who came in a bit

'You all right, love?' asked Mrs Crithin, leaning on her ago?'

mop.

'The darkie?'

Ace nodded and smiled reassuringly. 'Someone just Ace winced but sensed that Mrs Crithin's institutionalised walked over my grave.' She turned a few more pages of the racism wasn't intended to offend. She nodded.

paper and paused at a picture which showed a small dark

'That's Mr Degun. Nice enough young man. Always got a man and a leggy woman dancing at some delirious word for you. He works up there at the telescope. Often Californian festival.

comes in for his breakfast.'

'Lovely girl, isn't she?' said Mrs Crithin, looking over Ace let her get back to her chores, folded the paper, Ace's shoulder.

thanked her for breakfast and paid with some uncertainty 64

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out of the heavy, predecimal coins the Doctor had left on the This one was showing You Only Live Twice and there, table. She stepped outside and was soaked in moments, her under a chipped plate of glass, was a poster of Sean fringe hanging unpleasantly in her eyes as little drops of Connery, surrounded by Oriental women, and clutching a rain dribbled down her face.

space helmet in one hand and a gun in the other.

Most of the shops had crawled into life and Ace hurried When she'd mentioned going to the pictures she hadn't over to shelter under their dirty brown awnings.

meant it literally. She'd seen the film half a dozen times on A florid-faced man in a blood-stained white coat emerged TV anyway. But it might while away the afternoon into the dreary daylight, looked at the sky, grimaced and pleasantly while she waited for the Doctor. And at least went back inside. There was a slightly sinister wooden sign there would be no adverts to interrupt it.

in the shape of a smiling pig hanging on chains above the She was about to check the programme times when she shop and it swung back and forth as the man slammed the noticed Vijay's Land Rover parked opposite the café.

door.

Stealthily she looked around and then, hunching her Ace dug her hands into her pockets, feeling her fingers shoulders against the blasting rain, she crossed the street numbing in spite of her gloves.

and looked into the exposed rear of the vehicle.

Rain bounced off the motley collection of boxlike cars, Inside, there were a couple of tartan blankets, some huddled against both kerbs like frightened sheep. Ace walking boots and a lot of fairly antiquated-looking wondered how people could ever have fitted into such machinery. Ace decided to have a better look and, again things, never mind think them classy. Most of them looked looking about her furtively, clambered into the back.

like old school radiators with pram wheels on each corner.

There was a distant clatter and she snapped up her head She ran a finger across the shiny metallic paintwork of a to look out of the tarpaulin-covered tail section. Vijay was Morris Oxford and gazed in at its snug interior. There was a leaving The Shepherd's Cross, warmed, no doubt, by a glass pair of driving gloves on the dashboard and one of those or two of brandy.

wretched traffic-light air fresheners hanging from the mirror.

Without thinking, Ace flung one of the blankets over her Better than furry dice anyway, she thought.

head and crouched low amongst the machinery. One of the Across the street stood Crook Marsham's little cinema, a walking boots was jammed against her face and smelt none tall, thin building sandwiched between a travel agent's and too pleasant but she ignored it and kept very still. Vijay something which claimed to be a 'boutique'. A red-lettered clambered on board and slammed the door. Ace heard him ABC sign, fairly new, partially obscured the grimy shadows cough, sigh and then start the engine. In a moment, the of the old name: The Plaza.

Land Rover pulled away and they were on their way to the Ace laughed to herself. Old picture houses always had station. Ace suppressed a smile. This way she got to see the such exotic names in spite of their locations.

only vaguely interesting thing in the whole place and could easily be back for her appointment with the Doctor.

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'Sorry, Mr Bond,' she whispered as the vehicle sailed past large, black-robed man was bent studiously over a bed of the cinema.

soil.

Abbot Winstanley was enjoying the warmth of his The Doctor scurried

under the impressive granite greenhouse and had cheerfully abandoned his Gannex archway of the monastery entrance, furling his umbrella mackintosh and sou'wester hat in favour of the apron and with some relief. In the shadows, he pressed himself against battered panama he normally reserved for summer. Despite a wall and watched the rain coming down in diagonal slants.

the ramshackle insulation, the greenhouse was as warm as The monastery was solid, imposing and stained with age, any July day and, if he blocked out the hiss of the rain, great mossy outcrops uglifying its splendid tower and Winstanley could almost hear the drone of pollen-laden porticos. The Doctor's gaze ranged about the place and he bees as they flopped from one colourful bloom to the next.

rapidly determined the period, picturing the positions of the A light tapping at the pane broke his reverie and he open-air cloisters and dormitories in his mind's eye.

turned to see a blurred, duffel-coated figure grinning Perhaps there was even a library. The thought of a peaceful hopefully at him from outside.

afternoon out of the rain amongst old books gave him a

'Just a tick!' Winstanley called chirpily, putting down his little thrill of pleasure.

trowel. In an instant, he had flung back the door and He walked through a covered colonnade towards the rear revealed the Doctor.

of the building. A huge, blank stone wall dominated this

'Good morning. I'm the Doctor. I wonder if I might...'

eastern side and above it all loomed the spindly tower,

'Come in, come in!' urged the Abbot, giggling jutting like a tobacco-stained tooth into the eternally grey unnecessarily. 'We can't let this horrid weather inside, now clouds.

can we?'

The Doctor strolled on, careful to stay within the shelter of The Doctor mumbled an apology and found himself the walls, and soon came upon a rather forlorn-looking steered across the greenhouse threshold.

Winstanley vegetable garden, dotted with cracked flower pots and plot slammed the door and sat the Doctor down in a striped markers which projected in some unfathomable pattern deckchair which was as old and disreputable as the building from the drenched soil. Like a graveyard for tongue-itself.

depressors, thought the Doctor idly.

Winstanley was a round-faced pudding of a man who At the top of the garden, jammed against a stone wall, cheerfully adhered to Friar Tuck clichés. His large shaved stood a decrepit greenhouse. Its elaborate roof and once-head was freckled and sunburnt and his grin split his face elegant doorway suggested more prosperous days. Now like a slice of overripe melon. The Doctor was struck, several panes were blacked out and the woodwork, soaked, however, by the Abbot's watery blue eyes. Their stained and peeling, buckled away from the glass. Inside, a melancholy aspect seemed at odds with his massive personality.

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'Now then, my dear sir. Where were we? A doctor, are flat concrete hundreds of feet below. Saw himself falling, the you? Well, well, we're all in good health here as far as I can world and his life rushing away from him.

recall.' He let out another peal of unnecessary giggles. The He had come through that crisis, despite everything. Yet Doctor shrank back from the surfeit of good humour.

something of that fear and sense of doom seemed to hang

'I'm not here on medical matters,' he said soothingly, about him now as he stared across the grey moor.

glancing about at the ripening tomato plants. 'I was Rubbing his hand against the nape of his neck, the Doctor wondering if you'd be willing to let me spend some time followed Abbot Winstanley through the alcove and was here. Away from it all. Time to think...'

soon lost in the shadows.

‘Sanctuary, eh?’ cried the Abbot, rubbing his hands together. ‘Capital idea. We often get people popping in.

Something cold pressed itself against Betty’s cheek and More often to get out of the rain, though, I must admit!’ His her eyelids flickered. In the confusion of light and colour capacious frame shook with laughter.

she picked out a dark shape bobbing about her face. Her With surprising deftness, the Abbot slipped into his eyes snapped open and she took in the terrible shape mackintosh and floppy hat, ushering the Doctor outside into towering above her. A snow-cold, wasted hand held her what looked like, at last, diminishing rain.

chin so tightly that she could feel the skeletal fingers

‘I’m Mervyn Winstanley, by the way.’ He grasped the pressing into her flesh. She cried out and felt a wave of Doctor’s hand with his own sunburnt flipper and pumped it revulsion rising as her eyes flicked from detail to detail of until the Doctor’s knuckles ached.

the apparition before her.

As they negotiated the Somme-like garden, Winstanley Alfred Beadle’s empty sockets gazed into Betty’s red-related in a high, enthusiastic voice something of the rimmed eyes, his forced grin of decay seeming to grow even monastery’s history. At one time, it seemed, there had been wider. He wagged a bony finger as if to admonish her and almost four hundred brothers there.

then let out a chuckle from between his teeth which blasted

‘No call for it now, of course. There’s just me and, oh, his sister full in the face. The vile head seemed to shudder forty others. We have to make honey and novelty mugs just its way towards her, black moisture and weed trickling to keep the wolf from the door.’ He disappeared through a from its hair.

low archway. The Doctor hopped over one last muddy There was a voice inside Betty’s head and she shook trench and then paused as he reached the archway, gazing herself to try to ignore it, to escape the awful pressure of his back at the dish of the telescope which dominated the claws on her face, the proximity of his fleshless lips to her horizon. Something shivered up his back and the hairs on own mouth.

his neck rose in response. For a moment, he saw himself

‘What kind of a welcome’s this?’ the voice seemed to coo.

balanced on the slippery walkway of another telescope, the

‘Give your old brother a kiss...’

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The face jutted forward. Closer. Rank, salty breath Lawrence looked down at her anxiously as she twisted streamed across Betty’s face. Closer...

and knotted the sheets between shaking hands. He stroked She screamed so hard that she cracked her head against her forehead gently and made reassuring hushing sounds the side of the bath. For one long minute she lay panting until she turned over on her side, eyes glaring fixedly at the and retching where she had fainted, glaring about the room wall.

as if the walls themselves were about to attack her. Then she After staying a few minutes, Lawrence decided it was felt the cold bath panel against her cheek and, in a rush of time to call for help. Betty had coped with these nightmares logic, connected it to the imagined icy grip of her late long enough. He stood up and crossed the landing to the brother.

telephone.

A deep, relieved sigh hissed from between her clenched

‘Dad?’

teeth and she managed to haul herself into a sitting position Robin’s voice sailed up from the bar below. Lawrence against the bath. Blood roared in her ears. She glanced paused with his finger on the dial and pressed the receiver stiffly over her shoulder and realised the bathwater was to his chest.

about to overflow. Shakily, she got to her feet and turned off

‘Up here, Robin!’ he called over the bannister.

the juddering taps with some effort.

Robin was already on his way up, pulling off his coat and The rim of the bath was wet and warm. Betty sat down on scarf in agitation. ‘They said in the bar they heard…’

it heavily, letting the edge of her dressing gown trail in the

‘It’s all right, it’s all right. It’s Betty. Another of her bad steaming water. Brushing a lock of damp hair from her eye dreams.’

she began to take long, grateful breaths. Then she glanced Lawrence dialled a number, listened, frowned and then down at the carpet and started screaming.

dialled again. A dull crackling sound came from the receiver.

She didn’t stop, her throat and lungs aching with the

‘No answer. Funny.’

strain, even when Lawrence came belting up the stairs, Robin was making his way towards the bedroom.

looking crazily about him as if trying to locate the problem.

Lawrence put a hand on his son’s arm.

‘Betty! What is it? What’s the matter?’

‘She’ll be all right with me, son. Could you go across and She flung herself, weeping, into his arms, her breath see if Dr Shearsmith’s in? The phone seems to be playing coming in huge, hysterical gulps.

up.’

‘What is it? What is it?’ Lawrence insisted, shielding his Robin hesitated, glancing across the landing at the closed wife with burly arms.

bedroom door. ‘Well…’

But she was unable or unwilling to speak. Instead she

‘She’ll be OK with me.’

allowed him to lead her from the bathroom and lay her

‘Yeah. Yeah, of course. Whatever you think’s best.’

down on the bed.

Robin clattered away down the stairs and out through the bar. Lawrence sighed heavily and padded across the 72

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landing towards the bedroom. Passing the open bathroom face. She sniffed back shaky tears and looked at the bare door he failed to notice the large, wet boot marks rapidly brown poplars which lined the driveway. A fierce wind evaporating from the carpet.

shivered through them.

‘You know, I’ve always hated this time of year,’ she said, MRS CARSON: He’s changed. Different somehow!

without turning round. Trevithick merely grunted and NIGHTSHADE: All right, Barbara, don’t get hysterical.

toyed with his old script.

(Nightshade sits her down next to her unconscious husband and There was a car in the drive and Jill saw George Lowcock beckons Dr Barclay.)

bending to retrieve something from the boot. He and the NIGHTSHADE: Any word on those meteorites, Barclay?

other policemen had been at the Home for several hours BARCLAY: Not yet, sir. But we’ve found traces of now. Hours, thought Jill, since she’d seen Edmund’s Enstatite.

shattered window and had, much to her own disgust, given NIGHTSHADE: Hmm. Normal enough. And the rocket in to her compulsion to vomit. The old man had been crew?

surprisingly tactful, considering the mess she’d made of his BARCLAY: There’s no trace of them. Anywhere.

eiderdown, gently leading her to his chair next to the (The seated astronaut begins to moan, eyes staring ahead.) wardrobe with the broken door.

CARSON: Help me! Help me!

There was a short knock and Jill turned, smoothing the MRS CARSON: What is it? Robert? Don't you know me?

hair off her face in an effort to appear stoically calm.

Can't you say just one word?

George Lowcock, all overcoat, bulbous nose and whiskers, (Nightshade takes her to one side.) bustled into the room, flashing her one of his sweetest NIGHTSHADE: Leave him, Barbara. He'll come round. In smiles.

time.

'Well, love, nothing more we can do here.' He turned to (The telephone rings. Barclay answers.) Trevithick. 'You're sure there was nothing taken, sir?'

BARCLAY: Yes? Yes, of course. Right away.

'Absolutely,' muttered the old man.

NIGHTSHADE: What is it?

'Well, we know the glass was broken with some force.

BARCLAY: They've found something, sir. Down at the Apart from that, though...'

crash site.

'Just kids, then?' offered Jill without much confidence.

NIGHTSHADE: Come on!

'Probably. Yes.'

(They run from the room. Fade to black.) Trevithick, however, knew his Sherlock Holmes and was not to be put off. 'No clues? The soil outside the window Trevithick looked up from his perusal of the yellowing must be saturated. There have to be footprints of some

script on his knee. Jill stood by the window a few feet from kind.' His bushy eyebrows lifted expectantly.

him, letting the steam from her tea flood pleasantly into her 74

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Lowcock sighed. 'No sir. No footprints. No traces.

'I'm sorry. But have you? Is there anything else I should Nothing.'

know?'

Trevithick grunted again and jammed his pipe into his Trevithick avoided her glance and contemplated his shoes.

lopsided mouth. Jill began to usher the policeman out.

'I woke up and the window was smashed. I rang for you.

Lowcock put on his hat. 'Naturally, we'll investigate as far That's all.'

as possible, miss. If you like, I'll leave one of the lads on Jill stood up. 'Right then. In that case I'd better get on.

watch for the next few nights. Might make the old folks feel There's some workmen coming to fix your window. I've got a bit more secure.'

to get everyone ready who is going home for Christmas.'

'I haven't told them yet,' said Jill.

Trevithick eyed her cynically. 'Catching one last Yuletide

'Oh well.' Lowcock beamed again. 'Probably very wise.'

frolic before the cemetery, eh?'

He touched his hat and then, as he turned to the door,

'That's not very nice, Edmund.'

fixed Trevithick with a quizzical grin. 'Excuse me, sir. Have

‘Who’s going where, then?’ he asked brightly.

we met before?’

Jill looked up at the ceiling as if to conjure up a list of Trevithick rolled his eyes and adjusted himself in his seat.

figures. ‘Erm… the Rayner sisters are going to their family in

‘I don’t believe so.’

Birmingham. Mr Dutton, Mr Bollard and Mr Messingham…’

Jill decided to mediate. ‘This is Edmund Trevithick,

‘The Unholy Three?’

George, he used to be…’

Jill laughed. ‘Yes. They’re going to Blackpool…’

‘No! Don’t tell me… Hang on… Nightshade! That’s it!

‘God help Blackpool.’

Professor Nightshade! Eeh, we used to love that. Shepherd’s

‘And Mrs Holland is going over to Leeds.’

Cross used to empty when you were on. Especially that one Trevithick pulled a face. ‘You don’t mean they’re having where you found those things in the ground.’

her back after last year?’

Trevithick smiled as if humouring a child. Lowcock

‘That was an unfortunate mistake.’

fumbled in his raincoat and produced a battered address

‘Unfortunate mistake?’ Trevithick mocked. ‘I don’t call book. ‘Would you mind? It’s not for me, you understand…’

peeing on the Christmas tree an unfortunate mistake. More Trevithick scribbled his name on the flyleaf and Jill once like malice aforethought!’

again ushered out the beaming policeman. ‘Well, you Jill suppressed a smile. ‘She was overwrought, poor dear.

certainly made his day,’ she said, sitting down and Anyway, the others are off to a hotel in Ilkley for the smoothing her skirt.

duration. We’re taking a coach to York Station.’

‘Keep the punters happy, I always say.’

‘All except me.’

Jill looked at him keenly. ‘Now, Edmund. Are you sure

‘All except you. And because of your bloody-mindedness you’ve told me everything?’

I’ve got to spend my Christmas in Crook Marsham.’

‘Stop treating me like a bloody child.’

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Trevithick harrumphed but, in truth, he was rather

‘Well ... I’ll do my best.’ She took down a heavy sheepskin looking forward to it. Now that he had no family. He coat from its peg and went to tell Polly what had happened.

thought briefly of his daughter’s inert body on that Trevithick walked up to Robin. ‘You’re from the pub wretched autobahn. And his granddaughter. Run off to join aren’t you, lad?’ Robin nodded distractedly, glancing up the some hippy cult or other.

corridor. ‘Hmm,’ mused Trevithick. ‘I think I might No, now it would be just him and Jill. Probably pulling accompany you. We’ve had a bit of trouble of our own up crackers over a tin of Spam. He laughed lightly to himself.

here. I could murder a pint.’

‘Well, my dear. ‘Tis the season to be jolly.’

Robin smiled thinly. Trevithick went to fetch his coat and Jill smiled and placed a cool hand on his. He watched her hat. Realising that Jill would probably be some time, Robin leave the room and then turned back to the window. His slid down the wall and relaxed. He couldn’t work out what mind began to race. He had kept quiet about what had had happened to Dr Shearsmith. He was always in before really happened in his room. But what had happened? What four and had told everyone he was staying in Crook could he tell anyone? That some strange voice had Marsham for Christmas.

whispered the name of his old character out of the darkness?

Added to that, Robin had found the front door wide open That there was that dreadful smell? Like the mass grave he and the record player on, struggling scratchily through and his men had come across in Poland during the war.

‘That’s the way it is’ by the Ink Spots. There was an old Morbid, rotten, evil. Yes, that was it. There was something photograph album, too, lying on the hearthrug and open to terrible about that smell. Something long-buried that should show faded, white-bordered pictures of Dr Shearsmith and never have seen daylight again.

his late wife on some long-ago Christmas Day. Some time There was a commotion in the corridor and Trevithick during the thirties to judge from their clothes. There was a raised himself a little unsteadily to his feet. Robin was funny smell too. Like milk turning sour.

beyond the door, his face flushed and his breath coming in Jill strode towards Robin, a reassuring smile on her face.

gasps.

Trevithick appeared simultaneously, jamming a tweedy hat

‘Miss Mason? Miss Mason?’ he called. Jill came down the on to his head. Opening the front door, the three of them set corridor, her head cocked to one side. Trevithick shut the out together into the gathering dusk.

door behind him and joined them.

‘You’re Lawrence Yeadon’s son, aren’t you?’ said Jill.

Ace gazed down forlornly at the mud which caked her

‘What’s up?’

shoes. She’d watched Vijay open the security fence with Robin ran a hand through rain-glistened hair. ‘It’s my some sort of electronic key and then crouched under the mum. She’s not well. I tried to get Dr Shearsmith but he’s blankets again as they drove through into the compound.

not there. Can you help? You are a nurse?’ Jill pulled a face.

After he’d disappeared inside she’d waited and then hauled herself out.

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The radio telescope was certainly impressive, she father hunched over a pools coupon as Peter Dimmock read conceded: an enormous dish which towered over the E-out the football results on Sportsview.

shaped concrete buildings beneath. But once she’d walked Vijay would be outside, relishing the thrill which the around the thing twice she found herself at a bit of a loose wintry darkness gave to his games to hide and seek. He’d end. It was also getting dark and was still freezing cold.

press himself into dark corners or against midnight-black She thought briefly of barging through the big double trees, watching the wind stir skeletal branches above his doors and announcing herself but didn’t think this very head.

wise. Finally, she decided to walk back to the village and set Then air would burn his lungs as he pelted out of the off for the perimeter fence, shivering as another blast of icy wood, his friends in excited pursuit. After another wind rippled over the moor. Little tufts of purple heather adrenaline-powered race they would collapse on top of each shuddered like dry-land anemones.

other, giggling and hooting with joy.

The fence still sparkled with recent rain. Ace jumped a A sudden flare of yellow light in the porch would signal little as three arc lamps burst into life with a staccato clatter.

the appearance of his father, coupon dangling from his hand, Obviously part of the security set-up, she thought. Mind as he peered out into the darkness.

you, there hadn't been much evidence of restriction or

'Vijay? Vijay? Time to come in, now.'

surveillance so far. No knuckle-heads in peaked caps at any And Vijay would bid a sulky goodnight to his friends, rate and years of petty confrontations with school caretakers dragging his heels in anticipation of the Saturday-night bath.

and bouncers made her grateful for that.

He'd hug his knees to his chin, shrinking from the overly It was only when she had traipsed forlornly to the exit hot water which steamed around him and gaze at the black gate that she realised getting out would be rather more rectangle of night behind the flowery curtains.

difficult than getting in. There were two rows of barbed-He would hear his father pacing about downstairs, the wire ranged across the top of the fence and the gate itself television's sound an insulated mumble two floors below.

was solid steel mesh. The square grey box into which Mr Occasionally, just occasionally, in those formative years, Degun had inserted his key winked its red light at her his father would pause after draping the big, rough towel tauntingly.

around Vijay, look his son in the eye and say 'Bit of a treat

'Oh brilliant,' she muttered.

tonight.' To Vijay that could mean only one tiling. A new Nightshade serial.

Vijay, looking out of the window, failed to see Ace. Dusk was creeping into the periphery of his vision like spots So they would sit together before the tiny, flickering mottling the edges of a mirror. The rich navy-blue colour of screen, Vijay's eyes wide with terror, his father pretending the sky took him back to Saturdays at home as a child. His

indifference whilst clutching the chair till his knuckles whitened.

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Later, despite the excitement, Vijay would quietly wish he head on her breast as she soothed his fatigue away.

hadn't stayed up; his imagination transformed bedroom Enjoying the sweet smoothness of her body against his. He furniture or crumpled clothes into the bulky, crablike blinked and realised Cooper was talking to him. 'Sorry, creatures which the Professor had so recently encountered.

what?'

One night they had seemed so real. So real. He could have

'I said it's past four. I'll cover for you tonight. Get some sworn the thing was advancing across the room towards rest, you've done enough chasing around.' Vijay grinned him, mandibles swaying and dripping with fluid, eyes and thanked her warmly. Perhaps his dream wasn't so far ticking and twitching as it bore down...

off...

'All of them?'

He passed Hawthorne on the way to his room and the rat-It was Dr Cooper. Vijay turned from the window, once faced man shot him an inquisitive look. Cooper answered more conscious of the hum of the machinery around him.

the unasked question.

'As far as I can tell, yes,' he said. 'I tried the café, I tried

'I'm covering for Vijay tonight. He's been out all day the pub, I tried the callbox. I even tried the surgery...'

trying to find a phone that works. How's the...?'

‘No joy?’

Hawthorne dropped a pile of electrical components on to

‘Dr Shearsmith wasn’t there and the phone was definitely the bench and several rolled to the floor. ‘Buggered,’ he said out of order.’

and sat down.

Cooper sat down heavily. ‘Maybe it’s the weather.’

Vijay looked at his watch. Nearly four. Nearly time for Ace had barked her knuckles for the fifth time trying to Hawthorne to begin his shift. He blew air out of his cheeks scale the perimeter fence when she noticed the hole. One of noisily.

the arc lamps caught the outer edge of the torn mesh and

‘Oh, this is outrageous!’ cried Cooper, getting to her feet she ran expectantly towards it, feeling the cold air rasping and thumping the bench. ‘The biggest input of data, through her nose. The moor and sky, now just two broad however confusing, that we’ve ever had and we can’t tell strokes of darkness, bobbed around her as she jogged anyone about it! We’d be better off sending HQ a postcard.’

towards the fence. To her left, the parabolic dish blazed

‘What about the radio?’ asked Vijay, nervously stroking briefly as a circling lamp slid over its surface. Then she his moustache.

threw herself down by the hole.

‘Hawthorne’s fiddling with it. Looks like it’s gone the The wire seemed to have been wrenched apart, razor-same way as the phones.’ She strode across the room and edges folded back towards the outside. She groped her way picked up a sheaf of papers which had fallen to the floor.

through, careful to avoid the edges, and felt her knees

‘Where’s Holly?’

sinking into the peaty soil. Head through. She grasped a tuft

‘Still sleeping,’ said Vijay, and that was where he wanted of heather and pulled. Body through. Darkness pressed to be right now. Or, at least, in Holly’s embrace, resting his against her and she could feel

hot, uncomfortable sweat 82

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patches spreading across her back and arms. Manoeuvring She threw herself clear and hugged herself. There was a so that her feet wouldn't catch on the wire, Ace made a final rusty taste in her mouth and she realised she'd bitten her lip effort and rolled through on to the moor beyond.

in agitation.

The black and purple landscape glowered at her like a The beam came by again and this time there was no body.

bruised eye. She tried to ignore the mournful wind, stood No uniform. Only a blackness like engine oil on summer up, put her hands in her pockets and started the long walk grass and a lingering smell of decay.

back to the village. Then she hit it.

Ace wasted no time. Urging herself to keep calm, keep Ace caught the thing with her foot and was flung calm, keep calm, she struggled back under the fence and headlong into the soil. She tasted mud and felt it soaking sprinted the distance to the station entrance. Ignoring her her clothes as she jumped back. The sweeping beam crept earlier misgivings, she thrust out her hands and barged across the moor and Ace held her breath. The light came inside.

closer, suddenly illuminating the thing with horrible Cooper and Hawthorne looked up from their work and precision.

stared at her as if she were a gunslinger entering a saloon.

It was a uniformed man, his hands pulled back behind his Ace felt overwhelmed by the light and warmth, and head and broken at the wrists so that they hung grotesquely staggered as coloured dots exploded before her eyes. She limp. He wore a black peaked cap above a face which might slid into a chair as a warm, thick comma of blood curled its once have been youthful. But now it was foul.

way from her lips to her chin.

The eyes were blank, sunk in their sockets and dulled to a A man with arthritic hands, all bunched and knotted like strange grey colour above a mouth wrenched back in a rusty keys, was manning the bar of The Shepherd's Cross.

snapshot of sheer fright. Livid purple weals and scratches Trevithick didn't know him but was enjoying the pint of crazed the pasty skin.

stout he'd poured. Upstairs, Lawrence, Robin and Jill were Ace cried out and stepped back, immediately feeling the ministering to Betty's needs.

treacherous mud slip beneath her. Before she knew what Trevithick burped. It was getting on for seven o'clock and was happening, she was on top of it.

he would normally be settling down to watch television or Howling in fear and nausea and disgust, she struggled to read. He was halfway through Bleak House, always one of stand, to escape, but the thing seemed to erupt around her, his favourites, loving the way Dickens drew him into that belching out an unbelievable stink of corruption.

murky, fog-bound world.

The station light swept back again and Ace saw the body Tonight, though, a long-forgotten excitement, something expanding beneath her like a cast-off snakeskin, dark fluid like the thrill of live performance, was flowing through his draining away into the moor.

veins. There was the strange incident at the window, Mrs Yeadon's funny turn and his TV interview too. It was all very puzzling. And he liked a puzzle.

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Lawrence Yeadon's jukebox was playing a particularly Trevithick didn't like the use of the expression 'end up'

tacky version of 'White Christmas', all wispy soprano and but smiled back regardless. 'Believe it or not, I'd planned to electric piano, and

the pub was crowded with ruddy-faced, retire up here. Live with my daughter and son-in-law. But laughing punters.

they were killed in a car crash in Germany...'

Trevithick finished his pint and looked up as the frosted-

'Oh, I am sorry.' Lowcock's heavy features fell glass door opened. George Lowcock shuffled in, sympathetically.

accompanied by a blast of cold wind and a little whirlpool

'Anyway, I'd moved all my stuff and couldn't really of brown leaves. He rubbed his hands together rather afford a place of my own. So the vultures got me.'

theatrically and gave the pub one of his beaming smiles,

'Very pretty vultures if you ask me,' said Lowcock with a nodding to all his old friends from the village. He spotted hearty laugh, 'if that Miss Mason is anything to go by.'

Trevithick at once.

Trevithick laughed back. 'Hmm. Nice girl. Doesn't really

'Hello, Professor!' he boomed, striding over to belong with a load of old crocks though. She has ambition. I Trevithick's table. The old man flinched visibly and can see it in her eyes.'

acknowledged the policeman with an embarrassed, They sat in silence for a while, sipping their drinks. A lopsided smile.

cheery hubbub of voices crowded around them and one or

'I gave your autograph to my wife. She was right pleased,'

two couples began to exchange kisses under the mistletoe Locock enthused. 'Can I get you a pint?'

pinned above the bar. The red flocked wallpaper seemed to Trevithick perked up at this offer. 'Oh, that's very kind of glow and blur as Trevithick gazed at it. He smiled, rather you, Inspector.'

contentedly.

'Sergeant,' said Lowcock lightly. 'Call me George.'

‘So,’ he said finally. ‘How’s business?’

‘Er, thank you, George. A pint of Guinness, if you’d be so Unexpectedly, Lowcock’s face was rather solemn.

kind.’

‘Funniest thing really. I like to have a nice clean book at Lowcock stood up and did an elaborate mime to the man Christmas. Goodwill to all men and that. There’s usually behind the bar. This was evidently understood as the just a bit of rowdiness and the odd drunk.’

barman shortly pushed his way through the crowd, holding

‘But not this year?’ asked Trevithick, eyebrows raised over two pint glasses in his crooked hands.

the rim of his glass.

‘I had no idea we had a celebrity in the village,’ said

‘Two missing persons,’ said Lowcock gravely. ‘Old bloke Lowcock, after paying the barman.

called Prudhoe been gone since yesterday afternoon and

‘Oh, hardly that, George. It was quite a while ago.’

now Dr Shearsmith. His cleaning woman says he’s vanished Lowcock beamed at him. ‘Aye, but we all loved it. We’d into thin air.’

never go out when you were on. How’d you end up in

‘Yes, young Robin called to see him. Found the place Crook Marsham?’

empty and the door wide open, so he tells me.’

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‘Really?’ Lowcock scratched his whiskers thoughtfully.

The Doctor was enjoying a simple meal of soup, bread

‘And now the phones are out of order as well,’ said and cheese in the Abbot’s panelled study. Winstanley had Trevithick in the most mysterious voice he could muster.

made him extremely welcome, showing him around the The one he’d used to great effect when he presented Tales of well-preserved Norman cloisters and up the spindly black Terror for the BBC Light Programme.

tower. The Doctor had been introduced to about ten of the

‘Yours too, eh? We’ve been trying to get the GPO in but...’

monks, although he would have had difficulty telling them

‘The phones aren’t working,’ laughed Trevithick. ‘Mmm, apart, so blandly unperturbed were their expressions. This, makes you realise how dependent we all are on our mod again, was in stark contrast to the Abbot, whose troubled cons.’

eyes continued to undermine his determinedly cheery They both jumped as a high-pitched scream rang out countenance.

across the bar. The Christmas merriment froze like black ice.

Now the Doctor had been invited to a little late tea and Lowcock was on his feet in an instant and Trevithick had just finished the last of the soup when Winstanley came hobbled after him as he mounted the stairs.

in.

They crossed the landing and threw open the bedroom

‘All done? Good. Excellent.’

door. Betty lay on the bed, struggling against the restraining

‘Delicious,’ mumbled the Doctor, his mouth still stuffed arms of Lawrence and Robin.

with bread.

Jill stood by the bed, a fearful look in her eye.

‘I made the soup myself. Brother Jeremy made the bread.

‘Send him away!’ wailed Betty, painful sobs breaking up It’s rather fine, isn’t it?’ Winstanley moved over towards the her voice. ‘Send him away!’

blazing fire and warmed his backside. ‘Chilly places, I’m Robin managed to force her back on to the pillow and afraid.’

pressed a cold flannel to her forehead.

‘I don’t suppose they were built for comfort,’ said the

‘What’s the matter, Lol?’ said Lowcock, furrowing his Doctor, settling into a studded leather chair. Winstanley brow. Lawrence drew Lowcock to one side but Trevithick poured two glasses of ruby port. The room glowed around managed to overhear his desperate, unbelieving whisper.

them, a miasma of dancing shadows and reflected flame

‘It’s her brother.’

underscored by the reassuring tock of the Abbot’s long-case

‘Patrick?’

clock.

‘No, Alf.’

The Doctor could see pictures in the fire. Shifting faces

‘Alf?’

and events from long, long ago. Hadn’t he once sat like this

‘Yes. She says... she says she’s seen him again. She says with... Who was it? Victoria. Of course, Victoria. Outside the he’s come back for her.’

Cybertombs on Telos. Talking about his family. Sleeping in Trevithick frowned and looked down at Betty Yeadon, his memory. Sleeping...

flailing and thrashing on the bed.

‘Penny for them?’ said the Abbot cheerfully.

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The Doctor looked up, smiled. ‘Hmm? Oh, just thoughts.

our way of life. We could go over there tomorrow, if you Just thoughts.’

like?’

It was Winstanley’s turn to look into the fire. ‘You know, The Doctor considered this, already feeling his insatiable Doctor, I can’t tell you how good it is to have a new face curiosity rising. But then he remembered why he’d come to about the place. It can get awfully lonely up here. The the monastery and set his mouth determinedly.

moor... the wind. It’s not the most beneficial of

‘No. Thank you, but no. I’m not here to get involved.’

environments.’

‘As you wish,’ said Winstanley, pouring another glass of The Doctor

turned interested eyes on Winstanley who port.

avoided his gaze.

The Doctor sipped his drink and returned to his

‘You seem like a good listener, Doctor. Tell me...’ The contemplation of the fire. Winstanley began to hunt Abbot rolled the stem of his glass between pudgy fingers.

amongst his bookshelves.

‘Tell me, do you have faith?’

‘Perhaps you’d be interested in this, Doctor?’

‘Faith?’

The Doctor glanced at his pocket watch. It was a little Winstanley nodded.

after seven. He mustn’t forget his appointment with Ace.

The Doctor inclined his head slightly, throwing his face A small, vellum-bound book, dwarfed by the Abbot’s into deep shadow.

sausage-fingers, was pressed into his hand.

‘I used to think ... I used to think I had faith. Faith in what

‘Local history,’ said Winstanley. ‘And decidedly colourful was right and wrong. What was just.’

too.’

‘And now?’

‘Now I’m not so sure.’

The Abbot turned towards the fire, his eyes glistening as though he were crying. ‘Yes. I believe I know what you mean.’

The Doctor sat up sharply as if to break the mood of melancholy. ‘Tell me about your radio telescope.’

‘Oh, that’s a recent addition, Doctor. Five or six years old.

We’re tuned in to messages from the stars.’

‘Have they had any luck?’

Winstanley chuckled. ‘Not to my knowledge. They seem a nice lot up there, though. I’ve met Dr Cooper and Miss Kidd.

And Mr Degun often pops in. I believe he’s fascinated by 90

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The Doctor began to turn the brittle yellow pages which were crowded with crabbed print. Wide-bordered pictures appeared every once in a while, showing Saxon serfs labouring in the fields or building rudimentary houses on Chapter Four

the moorland. The Doctor recognised the village church, without its later embellishments, and finally came upon a splendid print showing a large, heavily fortified Norman castle, narrow flags spiking its battlements.

‘Marsham Castle,’ said the Abbot over his shoulder. ‘Built by Sir Brian de Fillis in - let me see now - 1156. Yes, 1156.’

He ran a hand over his shaved head. ‘Gone now, of course.’

In Phillip Jackson’s view, the day had already dragged on

‘One of the ruins that Cromwell knocked about a bit,’ said long enough. Now the night was hot and still, the cloying the Doctor smiling.

perfume of wild summer flowers mingling with wisps of

‘You’re closer than you think. Read on.’

gunsmoke. Overhead, the sky, smooth and unperturbed as The Doctor settled back, holding the small volume an upturned tea cup, was a rich collage of dark blue and between his hands.

sunset crimson.

This great victory upon the moor of Marston, given unto He laid back his handsome head and enjoyed the soft Parliament by the grace of our Lord Jesus, did result in the rout of pressure of the heather

tangling in the shining black locks of Prince Rupert and his men. God did make them as stubble to his hair. It had been a good day.

Cromwell's sword. Brave Ironsides, notwithstanding a grave Jackson's belief was strong: to fight for true democracy, injury, beat the Prince's horsemen into retreat and sent Captain the freedom to worship as he chose, and not to labour under Phillip Jackson in pursuit.

the tyrannical rule of an unworthy king. Today's victory Coming upon a troop of the Royalists in the castle of Marsham, had been sweet indeed but Jackson knew well how soon he in the county of York, Jackson reported that the King's Men did would be called upon to fight again. Had he not promised experience such ghastly terrors and phantoms that they cried Cromwell to pursue the Royalists to perdition if needs be?

aloud to heaven.

1644, however, had not been a good year for Parliament.

Upon surrendering themselves to Parliament's mercy, the castle King Charles stood firm even with the war two years old.

was consumed by a strange fire and all were glad to return to their Then had come a morale-crushing blow, only the previous camp. This place has long been notorious for weird happenings...

day, as Prince Rupert entered the city of York unopposed The Doctor looked up from his book and chewed his lip after crossing the north bank of the Swale. Sniping attacks thoughtfully.

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by Rupert's men had followed and Jackson saw Cromwell's like frightened sheep. The night was suddenly alive with face darkening with anger.

the yellow sashes of the Roundheads and the Royalists'

'We must stop and fight!' he had bellowed at the Earl of vivid scarlet.

Manchester. ‘Else lose all to that puppy Rupert.’

Cromwell’s dragoons, three thousand strong, attacked Manchester had sat long and thought hard, fingering the Lord Byron and the Royalist right wing, decimating them.

delicate embroidery of his collar. Then he nodded his assent.

Jackson hacked away with his sword, a rush of grotesque They had drawn up on the long ridge of open plain that faces flurrying past him.

stretched down to Marston Moor, Cromwell’s force of A musket ball whistled past his ear and he felt himself twenty-seven thousand against Rupert’s eighteen thousand.

twist and fall awkwardly from his horse. The ground raced A line of hedges and ditches separated the two armies. Six up to meet him, iron hard, and he lay there a moment, miles due west stood York and four miles to the east the winded and sick as booted feet staggered past. Then there little settlement of Crook Marsham, dominated by its ruined were strong hands under him and he opened his eyes to see Norman castle.

Cromwell himself lifting him bodily on to his horse.

Jackson had seen its sun-shimmered battlements hovering

‘Thank God we’ve not lost you,’ he said with a smile, the on the horizon.

fire of battle shining in his eyes.

Before battle could begin, Parliament had observed its Jackson pulled on the reins and charged again. A Royalist traditional good grace, allowing Rupert to await the Earl of soldier, his face already streaked with mud, and dark blood, Newcastle and his men. The day had worn on, the mood of launched himself at Jackson’s flank. The captain heaved his impatience spreading from the florid-faced Cromwell to his massive sword and took off half the soldier’s face in one troops. At around four in the afternoon, Newcastle’s men movement. The body fell under Jackson’s horse and the finally arrived. To Jackson’s disbelief they had retired for captain rode on, shouting in exhilaration.

supper, as they believed the hour too late for fighting that There was another salvo of musket fire and Cromwell day.

reeled in his saddle, his warty face contorting with pain.

At around seven in the evening, with the pleasant smell of Blood pumped from a wound in his neck. Jackson reigned woodsmoke drifting across the plain, Cromwell had come in his horse and called above the din of battle, ‘We must get into view, massive and inspiring astride his horse. He you to the field hospital, sir!’

narrowed his eyes, watching the distant enemy figures Cromwell shook his head, wiping the soil-caked wound moving like indistinct ink-blots on a purple canvas. He as if to dismiss it. ‘The second charge, Phillip, the second caught Jackson’s eye, smiled slightly, and then bellowed the charge!’

command to charge.

Jackson nodded worriedly and followed his brave leader With a great whooping cry, Parliament’s horsemen back to the ridge. After organising the second charge, thundered across the moor, scattering the surprised enemy Cromwell had finally assented to treatment and retired.

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Jackson and his men swept back on to the moor, Rupert’s thousand the Prince hath not four thousand left. Colours, routed cavalry fleeing before them. The fighting became muskets, men. All are ours.’

desperate, the iron stink of blood mingling with powder

‘And Rupert?’

smoke as the two forces waded into each other. Then with a Cromwell sighed. ‘Fled. Vanished. The jackanapes has the terrifying cry of triumph, Parliament’s reserve of three devil to protect him.’

thousand Scottish cavalry tore into the Royalist right wing Jackson unbuckled his belt and sat back on the warm which broke and fled.

ground. Cromwell changed tack.

‘Is this not a sight to behold!’ cried Cromwell, returning

‘But still there is more to do. The battle has fatigued thee, I from the field hospital sooner than he ought, with his neck know, but I must return to the Eastern Association. The war haphazardly dressed. At once, he declared Parliament’s is not yet won. I am relying on thee, Phillip, to remain here centre and right to be in a hellish state and, thrashing his and hunt down any of the king’s men who linger.’

horse, swept behind the enemy to his men’s assistance.

Jackson sighed inwardly. He was exhausted. All he How much longer the fighting had continued, Jackson wanted now was to bathe and sleep. He looked down at his couldn’t be sure. If he closed his eyes he saw only aching feet and nodded. ‘I am, as always, at your service, anguished faces and glittering swords. He let his eyes roll sir.’

back and gazed up at the darkening sky, the summer scents

‘Not mine, lad. The Lord’s,’ said Cromwell with a smile, of the moor stirring around him. Then, with a groan, he sat clapping the young captain on the shoulder.

up, eased off his boots and pulled down his stockings which

‘Take your men and circle a few miles hereabouts, but tax were blackened with leather stains and mud. A leg of roast them not too severely. Bring back Rupert and I’ll make a chicken was thrust into his hand and he ate ravenously, general of thee.’

pausing only when he saw Cromwell striding towards him Jackson watched Cromwell disappear into his tent. He out of the darkness.

was right, of course. There might still be a few Royalists

‘Your wound, sir?’ said Jackson, wiping greasy hands on hiding in the surrounding countryside. Perhaps even Rupert his tunic.

himself. It was worth sacrificing a few hours to find them.

Cromwell shrugged lightly. “Tis little. A scratch. A far Wearily, Jackson pulled up his stockings and forced his greater wound was Valentine Walton’s boy. I have written sweat-soaked boots on to his feet. Within half an hour he to the father, God grant him mercy.’

had rounded up a dozen unwilling soldiers and had begun Jackson

nodded sadly. The boy's death that day had been to trot away eastwards.

a great blow to them all.

He felt curiously drawn towards the fires of Crook

'But the victory is ours, Phillip. By God it is!' cried Marsham with its great ruined castle. On that fine, balmy Cromwell, his heavy face suffusing with passion. 'Of twenty July night, the old black towers were virtually indistinguishable against the wine-dark sky.

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Sad, tired eyes gazed across the moor towards the cheery

'What ails thee, Ralph?'

orange glow of Cromwell's camp. Sir Harry Cooke rubbed a Grey glanced down at the decrepit main hall in which the wounded hand against his brow and sat down heavily men were huddled.

against the crumbling castle rampart. Routed, by Christ.

'They're out of sorts, Sir Harry,' he said with a sigh.

Routed!

Cooke grimaced. 'We've suffered a great defeat, Ralph. I He boiled with frustration. Why did the King allow his would expect no less.'

armies to be led by such incompetents? Rupert, the arrogant Grey shook his head slowly. 'No sir, 'tis this place.'

fool, had calmly taken supper though Cooke had warned of

'This old ruin? What of it?'

impending attack. 'They have not your sensibilities, your Grey ran a finger across his beard. 'The men are afraid, Highness,' he had insisted through clenched teeth, 'and care my lord. They feel there is some evil

at work here.'

little for the lateness of the hour.'

Cooke snorted.

And then stupid sulky Newcastle, retiring to his carriage

'They say they would rather face Cromwell than the to smoke a pipe!

Devil,' Grey continued.

Cromwell's men, sitting in their corn fields, had begun

'Much the same thing,' laughed Cooke, his portly frame singing psalms, their rousing, passionate voices drifting shaking. 'Come, Ralph, we're too old and wily to believe in through the summer haze.

such nonsense.'

'Is Cromwell there?' Rupert had asked anxiously. Aye, he Grey made a little signal with his hand. 'There is a man, was there, as they had discovered all too soon, caught sir...'

unawares, their senses dulled by inertia.

A slight figure stepped out of the shadows, his uniform Cooke and six or seven of his men had eventually fled the caked with mud and gashed at the sleeve.

carnage, skulking to the old castle like disgraced dogs.

'This is Will Todd, my lord,' said Grey, ushering the There were men stationed on the far ramparts, looking youth forward. 'A local man. Tell Sir Harry what you told down into the tiny settlement below. It was important they me, Will.'

were not seen. Cooke knew from experience that loyalties Todd shifted uneasily, like a guilty child.

were uncertain in this conflict and that the inhabitants of

'I was born in Crook Marsham, my lord. But my family Crook Marsham might welcome them with open arms, only went to York some years ago, my father being a skilled to betray them to Cromwell's militia. Better to hide out in mason and work there plentiful...'

the old ruin where no one was likely to pry and then slip

‘Yes, yes...’ said Cooke impatiently.

away at some more opportune moment.

‘This castle has stood since William of France came here Ralph Grey, his fine-boned face drawn and weary, and has been a ruin all that time.’

shambled along the battlements towards Cooke, who

‘What mean you by that?’

sensed he was troubled.

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‘Only a few years after the castle was built there were within minutes, the cold stone walls were plunged into queer tales about the place. People spoke of the dead rising midnight blackness.

at night and all manner of things...’

The high, roofless castle beams loomed above them like

‘Phantasmagoria,’ said Cooke, waving his hand the ribs of a long-dead beast. Cooke glanced about him in dismissively.

the whispering night at the deeply shadowed niches and Will Todd clenched his fists uncomfortably. ‘Sir Brian, the empty fireplaces which might contain all manner of secrets.

Norman who built the castle, went mad. They say his wife He shivered and, drawing his cloak around his shoulders, came back from the grave to haunt him. After that no one made his way stiffly down the stairs to his men. He looked would live here. No one.’

at their troubled faces as they drifted into sleep. Despite his Cooke eyed him severely. ‘And this prattle of yours has bluster, he rather wished Will Todd had not told him those put the men into a ghastly

humour, eh, Todd? I should have tales about the old castle. He screwed his eyes tightly shut.

you horsewhipped for spreading such discontent. You're no better than a gossipy old woman.'

Jackson let his horse trot quietly along the well-trampled

'I never meant...' pleaded Todd weakly.

path that led to the castle. His men trailed in a silent, weary

'No, but the damage is done. We would do better to go to procession behind him, their shoulders bowed with fatigue.

our beds and forget these tales of yours. Off with you, now.'

Jackson himself found that the gentle rocking motion was Todd made a little bow and clattered down the stone lulling him into sleep when a hissed whisper startled him staircase to the ruined hall. Grey turned to his superior.

awake.

'Don't you feel it too, sir?'

'Captain!'

'Nay!' barked Cooke. 'And, mayhap, if your mind were Jackson turned. A soldier behind him, obviously more turned more towards soldiery than witchcraft we should alert than his comrades, was pointing towards the castle.

not have been trounced on the moor today!'

'What is it?'

Grey flinched and stepped back.

'There's someone there, sir. I swear it. Down there, by the Cooke sighed and looked at Grey more kindly.

gates.'

'I am sorry, Ralph. We lost many good lads today. If any Jackson strained his eyes. Was that a figure - no, two -in man is out of sorts then it is I. To your bed now, old friend.'

the shadows by the castle's sturdy entrance? He sat up in Grey bowed slightly and disappeared down the steps, his his saddle but whatever had been there was lost in the deep boots echoing hollowly around the stones. Cooke rubbed blue shadows.

his tired face with his injured hand and looked down at his

'I see nothing,' he said wearily. 'But we'll stop here and men as they wrapped horse blankets around themselves.

rest awhile.'

The tiny fire they had lit was flickering into extinction and, 100

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His men flopped gratefully from their saddles and led crashed down. This time, Cooke screamed and felt the air their horses to a little circle of trees. Within moments they vomiting from his lungs in an unstoppable screech.

were stretched out on the hard ground, asleep.

The night exploded around him like a dam-burst. He sat Jackson himself stayed in his saddle for a time, gazing up, shaking with fear and grief, looking about him like a over at the darkened battlements some five hundred yards startled animal. Dark ruins. Sleeping men. Warm night distant. The night was warm, silent, expectant.

breeze. He sighed. They were still in that damned castle.

He rubbed his face and neck, already feeling the sweat Sunlight streamed through the children's hair as they growing clammy on his flesh. Ralph Grey was asleep nearby, jumped and capered about. Harry Cooke watched their his blanketed form undisturbed.

smiling faces and felt himself laugh silently. His daughters, Cooke let his head sink on to his chest. Why had he Bridget and tiny Mary with her big brown eyes, so happy dreamed about them tonight? It was two years now since and content in the gardens, hiding in the old stables and they'd been taken from him, and by brain fever, not the amongst the fragrant bushes.

sword of some treacherous Roundhead. He thought once Then the sky seemed to darken. A solid, warty face again of his daughters' golden ringlets and their clear, loomed out of the shadows, casting gloom over the happy smiling faces.

scene. The children turned and screamed, running to their Something moved on the battlements.

father for protection. Cooke held out his arms but his Cooke craned his neck and got to his feet, groaning with daughters seemed to make little progress, as though they effort. He picked his way through the sleeping soldiers and were wading through molasses.

dragged himself up the stone steps to the battlements. The The ominous face seemed to swell, blotting out the night was silent now, save for a distant rustling as if the sunshine. Cooke narrowed his eyes and glared at the breeze were stirring the blossom-laden branches of distant apparition. It was Cromwell.

trees.

Of course, it was always Cromwell.

He could see no one on the walkway. As he turned to Now there were soldiers in the garden, faceless make his way back into the ruined hall, there was a soft Roundheads in dull, pewter-coloured armour. Light flashed giggle from the shadows. Cooke seemed to recognise it at on their swords as they raised their weapons high in the air.

once and spun round.

Cooke tried to scream but could feel only a silent

'Who's there? Come out!'

tightening in his chest. Mary looked up at the shimmering Now he could hear a gentle voice ringing in his ears.

blade and shot a desperate look at her father. The Some sweet lullaby he remembered his wife singing to the Roundhead stepped forward, his dark figure a hazy children. The sound seemed to buzz around his head, silhouette against the white light of the sun. The sword making him swoon and tremble. It was beautiful. And so sad.

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Two shapes detached themselves from the walls and turning into glistening maws. He began to thrash at them stepped out before him. There was no moonlight to reveal desperately. Prickles of yellow light shimmered over the them in detail but Cooke recognised them at once. He sank apparitions' surfaces as they blurred and shimmered into to his knees and cried out.

one, drawing Cooke's screaming body into them. Grey got Bridget and Mary walked towards him, their perfect, to within a few yards of the horror and then flung himself heart-shaped faces smiling delightedly.

back against the walls.

'Papa! Oh, Papa!'

'Get out! Get out!' he screeched at the men below. 'For Their voices were like a balm to his grief.

Christ's sake! Or we're finished!'

'Oh my little pretties!' he cried out, his voice cracking Cooke was merging with his daughters now, forming a with emotion. He stumbled towards them across the column of blazing light in which shapes seemed to twist like walkway.

monstrous embryos.

'Sir Harry!'

The men hesitated below. Grey shielded his face from the Cooke looked down. Ralph Grey and two other men were intense light before him and bellowed at the soldiers.

gazing up at him in horror.

'We are bewitched! Go! For your souls' sake!'

'Sir Harry, this is the Devil's work!'

The terrified men scrambled at the heavy doors and flung Cooke fell to his knees again, gazing appealingly at the them open. Outside, the

night was strangely calm. They ran little figures before him as if willing them to be real.

at full pelt away from the castle, lungs and legs searing with

‘But my daughters…’ he said desperately.

pain.

‘Your daughters are dead, my lord.’ Grey kept his calm, Grey knew that his position was hopeless. His idea of though fear was coursing through him.

rescuing Sir Harry was impossible; the knight he had served

‘Dead?’ Cooke looked at his daughters with sad, so faithfully had vanished into the ball of fire before him.

exhausted eyes.

Grey began to heave himself over the battlements, his tired

‘Come away, Sir Harry. I beg you. Come away.’

hands gripping at the ancient stonework for support.

Cooke glanced down at Grey and then at the happy, Tendrils of energy whipped and crackled about him as the smiling faces in front of him.

column of energy slid nearer. He paused briefly on the

‘Come, my dears. Come to your father,’ he said hoarsely.

ramparts, the world spinning dizzily about him. He

‘No!’ Grey cried out, bolting for the steps.

wouldn’t survive the fall, he knew, but there were worse The little girls grinned and moved swiftly to their father things than death. The nebulous thing which had been Sir with outstretched arms, their skirts whispering over the Harry lapped at the stonework like hellish flotsam. Grey floor.

closed his eyes and threw himself into space.

Cooke opened his arms to embrace them and began to squeal horribly as their little faces fell inwards, smiles 104

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Jackson saw them first, racing across the moor as if the Cautiously, Jackson mounted the stone steps and emerged devil were at their heels. He looked up from his recumbent on to the walkway.

position as terrified cries echoed through the night. In an Sir Harry Cooke lay sprawled on his back with a look of instant his men were alert and on their feet.

abject horror on his face, his limbs smashed and broken.

‘I knew it!’ he cried delightedly. ‘I knew they were Jackson walked slowly towards the corpse, stretching out a hereabouts!’

gloved hand to touch the purple face.

But the smile froze on his lips as he saw the gibbering He cried out as his fingers pushed straight through men tumbling through the undergrowth towards him.

Cooke’s forehead as though through rotten fruit. He

‘Take your prisoners, lads!’ Jackson ordered, jogging up to shuddered and felt bile burn his throat as the body Will Todd as the young man collapsed on to the ground.

crumbled to greasy dust before him.

The Roundheads laid hands on the fleeing enemy as they Outside the gates, the horse began to snort and stamp, staggered into the circle of trees.

unnerved. Jackson looked at the creaking beams and black

‘Sweet mercy, save us!’ cried Todd, pawing at Jackson’s stonework. They seemed to quiver and distort as though he legs.

were drunk, swooping, blurring and bending out of shape.

‘What is it! What ails thee?’ Jackson laid a kindly hand on The air was charged. Jackson shuddered.

the boy’s shoulder.

A vast tendril of boiling energy began to crackle around Todd looked up fearfully. ‘We are bewitched!’

the battlements like St Elmo’s fire, seeping down the stained Jackson frowned and then turned swiftly to his walls and licking at the edges of the gateway. Every stone in subordinates, ordering them to treat their prisoners with the castle shone with unearthly radiance.

care and kindness. Then he mounted his horse and set off at Jackson lost no time, staggering down the steps and across a gallop for the castle.

the empty hall which was bucking like a ship in a storm. He Within minutes, the skeletal towers loomed above him pounded through the gates, dodging to avoid Ralph Grey’s and he slowed to a gentle trot. The doors were wide open body, and threw himself on to his horse, flogging at it and horribly inviting. His horse snorted and pulled back a madly until he had put half a mile between himself and the little. Jackson glanced down and gasped as he saw Ralph castle.

Grey’s broken body staring up at him, neck lolling to one Light began to rip and twist at the stonework. Jackson cast side.

back glance after glance, urging his horse onwards with Jackson dismounted and stepped over Grey’s body. The stabs of his spurs.

hall before him was silent and dark. He glanced around, trying to pick out shapes from the confusion of black shadows. Up on the battlements, there seemed to be the faintest trace of light, like the dying embers of a fire.

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terrible that not a stone remained come the morning. Certainly there is no trace of Marsham Castle today but the visitor may enjoy a fine view of the ancient battlefield from the hill which remains.

The Doctor closed the second book which the Abbot had given him and frowned deeply.

‘Interesting?’ said Winstanley, still pottering about the shelves.

‘Arresting,’ said the Doctor. ‘Tell me, what’s become of this... hill that the castle stood upon?’ Winstanley ran his hand along a line of gilt-embossed books. ‘Oh, it was just a local beauty spot for years...’

‘Is that all?’

His men and the prisoners were gazing at the castle in Winstanley looked up from the brown pages of a awe.

spineless tome and thrummed his fingers against his side.

Jackson’s horse thundered into view and he thrashed his

‘Well, until they built the radio telescope on it.’

arms about in frustration.

‘Down! Get down! Lest you lose your wits!’

Great pulses of energy seemed to flood across the moor from the castle which blazed like an Armada beacon against the night sky. Jackson threw himself clear of his horse and rolled under the trees, tucking his head under his folded arms. The soldiers followed suit and scurried for shelter, crying out in distress as a tumultuous explosion stunned their senses. Then the sky seemed to split apart as though the sun had disintegrated.

The original castle, which had stood empty for many hundreds of years, was eventually destroyed during the Civil Wars, just after the battle of Marston Moor. The cause of the fire was unknown but contemporary reports speak of a conflagration so 108

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Storey’s natural successor. To his chagrin, the power vacuum had been filled, not only by a stranger, but by a woman. His working relationship with Dr Christine Cooper was always tense but he found himself thriving on the Chapter Five

frisson between them. Before long, the ebullient scientist commanded his respect and loyalty. Now they were together again, in what Hawthorne was sure must be the bleakest corner of England. Nevertheless, it was England.

He had hated Australia. Hated the flies, the heat and the irritating good humour of the locals, forever slapping him on the back or pressing gnat’s-piss beer into his hand. He had returned to London with great relief, relishing the Thomas Edward Hawthorne liked order. Trains that ran drizzle, the smell of damp earth and the sound of cabs on time, freshly rolled cricket pitches, neatly pressed suits slicing through rain-puddled streets. It had been good for a and folded handkerchiefs. He had lived his whole fifty-five while.

years according to an ordered pattern: passing from a But London had changed. As the weeks went by, straightforward childhood to a straightforward school and a Hawthorne found himself experiencing something like straightforward double First in Mathematics and

Physics.

culture shock. Men who looked like girls paraded up and Above all, he loved the order of numbers, that indefinable, down the streets, wearing embroidered Indian frocks and near-poetic quality which abstract higher maths could their hair down to their shoulders. Young people were in achieve. Sometimes he would sit alone in his sparsely open rebellion against authority, organising ‘sit-ins’ at the furnished flat and simply let his mind wander, drift and LSE or even dropping out of society altogether to live in twist along the mental pathways he had created out of miserable hippy communes. Next best thing to anarchy in beautiful numbers. Those who knew only the cynical his opinion.

misanthrope would never believe the smile of sheer One aspect of British life, however, needled him like no pleasure which inevitably crept across his face.

other, just as its threatened arrival had back in the thirties.

He had risen quickly in his chosen field, joining Frederick There were blacks everywhere.

Storey and his team of radio astronomers, first in Manning the building sites, crowding the labour Cambridge and later in the famous New South Wales exchanges and positively overrunning London Transport. It experiments of the late fifties. Those embryonic days had was unbelievable.

been exciting and fulfilling, Hawthorne and Storey making He thought of the friends who had died in the War, died a strong team. After his mentor’s retirement, Hawthorne to preserve a country and a way of life which they revered.

had been confident of promotion, believing himself to be 110

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Now it was polluted by the dregs of Empire. By God, it was Tar Baby, they were dirty, unnatural, somehow less than a sad time to be an Englishman.

human. And Hawthorne was still checking under his bed.

As a young man, he had walked a hundred miles to hear The phone call from Cooper inviting him to join her in Oswald Mosley speaking. He could taste the atmosphere Yorkshire had been all the excuse he needed. Leaving even now: thousands of like-minded men, splendid in their London was like recovering from a long illness and the black shirts, listening to that incredible orator denouncing further north he travelled, the more certain and traditional the coons and the yids and all the other scum that were things seemed to become. But then he had arrived in sapping Britain's strength.

Bradford, realising with sick certainty that he had swapped But Hawthorne was no longer a young man. He had one wave of immigrants for another. There to meet him at watched his dream of a racially pure country vanish in a the station was his new colleague: young, handsome, wash of feeble liberalism.

intelligent and brown as a berry.

Somewhere, deep in the shadows of his complex mind, Hawthorne found himself flinching whenever Vijay came Hawthorne kept his own private bogey-man. An image near him, the boy's cultured, almost too English accent from his childhood half-wrapped in fear and half in annoying him intensely. It seemed unnatural and forced, nostalgia, bringing with it memories of his mother as she sat like a chimp at the zoo dressed in human clothes - an by the bed reading stories. Even as a child, Hawthorne had analogy which pleased Hawthorne immensely.

possessed a rational mind, his imagination balking at the He was glad to work with Cooper again. She brought obvious conceits of the fairy story. How could a carpet fly?

back some of the certainties of before, her no-nonsense How could a genie fit inside a bottle?

attitude a sturdy rock upon which to anchor his future. The Only one story fascinated him and he would urge his Kidd girl was all right too, if a bit cocksure and modern in mother to read it over and over again. It was a little Uncle her thinking. She was a friend of Jocelyn Bell, the Remus tale concerning Brer Fox's plan to ensnare Brer postgraduate down at the Mullard observatory who had Rabbit in a thorny bush by means of a sticky facsimile child discovered the first pulsar earlier in the year.

called the Tar Baby.

But now there was this flood of bizarre, unfathomable Hawthorne had never been afraid of the nasty fox, never data, none of which made any sense. And the telephones really cared whether Brer Rabbit would escape or not. It was were out of order. The only certainty seemed to be that the the image of that sightless, dripping black baby in its cage of double star Bellatrix, in Orion, had just gone nova. The prickles which haunted him. He would check under his bed signals were just discernible amongst the nonsense which every night, fearful that a tacky black paw would clutch at had overwhelmed their systems the previous night.

his ankle.

Thomas Edward Hawthorne liked order. At twenty-six Without really knowing why, he still connected his fear of minutes to eight on 23 December, a chunk of disorder called outsiders with that terrifying childhood memory. Like the Ace came into his life.

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‘What the hell...?’

‘Well, young lady. What are we going to do with you?’

Cooper scurried towards Ace and managed to prevent the girl’s head from hitting the console. Ace flopped weakly The night had become dry and frostily clear. The Doctor, into Cooper’s arms, sucking her cut lip and mumbling strolling into Crook Marsham with his umbrella hoisted insensibly.

over his shoulder, looked up at the bone-white moon on its

‘Trespassers,’ sighed Hawthorne. ‘That’s all we need.

bed of brilliant stars. He breathed in deeply and enjoyed the What’s happened to the bloody security guard? It’s cold air which flooded his lungs.

outrageous.’

Leaving the moor path, the Doctor rounded the corner of

‘Gone AWOL,’ said Cooper, prising open one of Ace’s the Post Office and walked up the main street, his shoes eyelids.

crunching smartly on the frost-crazed pavement.

‘It’s outrageous.’

There was a soft chime from his coat pocket and he noted

‘All right. You’ve made your point. Help me get her into with some satisfaction that he was almost exactly on time.

the chair. She’s in a state.’

The Abbot’s books, intriguing though they were, hadn’t Gingerly, Hawthorne took Ace’s arm and dragged her delayed him unduly. Strange coincidence, that. The over to a padded chair, noting her curious clothes with telescope being built on the site of the old castle. A castle some distaste.

reputed to be haunted and destroyed by a mysterious fire.

‘Locals wandering all over the moor. You’d’ve thought The Doctor smiled. Every old building had its echoes, they’d be used to the telescope by now.’ He pushed his every battlefield its mournful piper or whey-faced soldier.

glasses back up the bridge of his nose and ran a hand Ten a penny.

through brilliantined hair. Cooper wiped the blood from No, it was time to face the future. Act on his impulses and Ace’s mouth with a handkerchief.

do something positive about his resolution to... How had

‘Look at her clothes. They’re a conservative lot in these Ace put it? Retire. Yes. There was something comforting parts.’

about that word.

‘She looks like a dustman in that jacket. The things they I have done enough.

wear these days.’

It was good to be here in a tiny, dull corner of his Hawthorne turned his attention to the data chattering favourite planet with nothing to

distract or entice him. He before him. The green display flared light across his gaunt glanced back across the moor and saw the telescope dish, features.

illuminated by its arc lamps, shining brilliantly in the dark

‘Bellatrix again. Hell of a nova. I just wish we could sort night.

out the real signals from all this... dross.’

I have done enough...

Cooper frowned thoughtfully, sat back on a bench and looked at Ace’s sleeping form.

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Warm colours and a babble of excited voices washed over The big policeman took the Doctor’s arm and led him up the Doctor as he pushed open the door of The Shepherd’s the stairs, Trevithick trailing behind. ‘It’s just up here, Cross.

Doctor er...?’

The room was packed. Alcohol-flushed faces bobbed

‘The patient?’ said the Doctor quickly.

amongst a mist of cigarette smoke. Trevithick and Lowcock

‘It’s Mrs Yeadon,’ called Trevithick from behind. ‘The were pressed into a corner, speaking in urgent whispers.

landlord’s wife. Seems to be in a state of shock.’

‘She needs a doctor,’ Trevithick urged. ‘We have to get the Inside the bedroom, the Doctor was introduced to Jill and phones working.’

Lawrence and reacquainted with Robin, who apologised The Doctor pushed his way through the crowd to the bar again for running him down that morning.

and ordered a glass of ginger beer. Ace was nowhere to be The Doctor removed both his coats and rolled up his shirt seen. He clicked his tongue in annoyance. Trust that girl to sleeves.

get herself lost. No, not a girl any more, he reminded Betty Yeadon was semiconscious, her eyelids twitching as himself. A woman now, even if a little pig-headed and if desperate to spring open. Robin sat by the bed, holding immature.

his stepmother's hand.

'Miss Mason has sedated her,' said Lowcock. 'She'll be all

'What happened?' asked the Doctor.

right till we can get proper help.'

'She's been having nightmares.' Lawrence's voice was The Doctor glanced across the room and caught the eye of thick with fatigue and emotion. 'This afternoon I heard her Mrs Crithin, now looking quite glamorous in a tight-fitting screaming and found her in the bathroom. She didn't say mini-dress. She gave him a kindly smile and called 'Evening, anything for ages, but...' He hesitated, looking from his wife Doctor.'

to his son and down to the floor.

Trevithick and Lowcock turned simultaneously and

'But?'

looked the little stranger up and down.

'She's been dreaming about her brother, Alfred. He was

'A doctor, are you? Smashing. Would you mind...?'

killed during the War. She... feels guilty about his death.'

'Ah well. I'm rather busy...'

Robin looked up. 'Why, though? She's never explained it.

'It's just that we're having trouble with our phones and Uncle Alf knew what he was doing. It wasn't Mum's fault our own doctor can't be found.' Lowcock looked he got killed.'

appealingly at the Doctor. The Doctor opened his mouth to Lawrence thrust his hands into his pockets and sank his protest and then sighed. He could give a little of his time to head on to his chest. ‘She thought it was her fault, Robin.

helping these people. It wasn’t really getting involved at all...

Your Uncle Alf was a conscientious objector. He refused to

‘Very well.’

fight. At least, at first...’

‘Wonderful. This way please.’

‘So?’ Robin’s question hung in the air.

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‘Betty was just a teenager then. I don’t suppose she really can’t get anyone on the phone. Would you come with me, understood the issues. Anyway, her friends began to taunt Doctor?’

her about her brother and she started to get at him. The The Doctor looked about evasively. ‘Unfortunately, I have whole white feather bit. Eventually he caved in. Joined up.

a prior engagement. Perhaps your friend here...?’

Three months later, he was dead.’

Lowcock nodded. ‘I’ll come with you, Lol. I’m sure they

‘How did it happen?’ Jill’s face was a mask of sympathetic can manage at the station for a few hours.’

concern.

Lawrence thanked him and then showed out Jill, whose

‘His ship was torpedoed in the Pacific. Half the crew mind was already

full of her old charges and their survived the sinking but the sharks got most of them, Alf Christmas destinations. ‘Thanks for your help, Doctor…?’

included.’

‘Don’t mention it.’ The Doctor smiled.

‘God.’

‘Any word on Jack Prudhoe?’ asked Lawrence.

Lawrence sat on the edge of the bed and took Betty’s Lowcock shook his head. ‘No. Nor Dr Shearsmith.’

feverish hand in his. ‘She reckons he’d be alive today if she Lawrence sighed. ‘Robin, can you stay with your mum hadn’t interfered.’

while we’re away?’

The Doctor had taken Betty’s pulse and temperature.

Nodding, Robin resumed his place by the bedside.

‘What did you give her?’ he asked Jill.

Lawrence and Lowcock left the room, discussing the

‘Just some of her own sleeping pills.’

relative merits of the infirmary and the general hospital.

The Doctor nodded, producing a tiny green bottle from

‘Fancy a pint?’ said Trevithick as he and the Doctor his trouser pocket. There was a soft plop as he unstoppered descended the stairs.

the bottle and waved it under Betty’s nose. For a moment,

‘Perhaps another time.’

everyone was aware of a sweet, heavy odour, and then

‘Not seen you around here before, have I?’

Betty seemed to sink into a deep sleep, her agitated limbs

‘No. My friend and I are just travelling in these parts.’

settling on to the blankets.

‘She’ll sleep properly now,’ said the Doctor, straightening Back in the bedroom, Robin’s ears pricked up as the up. ‘The nightmares have become much worse, then?’

Doctor’s words floated up the stairs. His friend? That girl

‘Progressively,’ said Lawrence. ‘But today... today was he’d been with earlier. The one with the long hair and the something different. I couldn’t make it out at first. But she lovely eyes. Robin smiled slightly to himself and looked says she’s seen Alf. His ghost.’

down at Betty’s peaceful form.

‘Ghost?’ The Doctor’s eyes flicked up.

Lawrence nodded and shrugged his shoulders. ‘I want her Trevithick had persuaded the Doctor to stay and returned to have professional help. I’m going over to York tonight. I from the bar with a ginger beer and a frothy Guinness.

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‘I say, Doctor, I wonder if I might ask your advice. I need The Doctor looked up as the door opened and a small, an objective opinion on all this.’ Trevithick raised his glass.

red-haired man came in. Still no Ace. ‘And you think this

‘Cheers.’

has something to do with Mrs Yeadon?’

‘Cheers. All what?’ The Doctor sipped his ginger beer and

‘I don’t know, Doctor. But now the phones are all out of sat down.

order and two people have gone missing. Lawrence told me

‘There are some funny things going on in this village, that Jack

Prudhoe came in here yesterday afternoon. He saw Doctor. I can't quite put my finger on it but I have this something out of the window and just ran outside. No one's feeling... Good Lord, how rude of me. I haven't even seen him since.'

introduced myself. I'm Trevithick.'

The Doctor looked away. 'I'm sure there's a perfectly

'The engineer?' said the Doctor brightly. 'Oh, my dear rational explanation,' he said unconvincingly.

fellow, I've always wanted to meet you... No. Wait. Wrong Trevithick looked disappointed that his new confidant century, isn't it? Different chap.'

wasn't more enthusiastic.

'Edmund Trevithick,' said the old man, rather crestfallen.

'Excuse me a moment,' said the Doctor, standing and

'The actor. I used to be Professor Nightshade. D'you crossing to where Mrs Crithin was sitting, her mouth open remember?'

in mid-anecdote.

The Doctor gave another of his evasive smiles. 'I get about

'Hello, love,' she said as the Doctor raised his hat.

a bit.'

Unseen by both, Robin crept to the bottom of the stairs.

'Well, never mind. The thing is, last night, at the old folk's

'I was wondering whether you'd seen anything of my home where I'm billeted, someone broke in. Someone or young friend?' said the Doctor.

something.'

Mrs Crithin pulled a face. 'Not since this morning, love.

'What are you getting at?'

She stayed a good while after you left and we had a chat.

Trevithick gazed down at his pint. ‘I saw a figure. In the She did seem interested in the telescope, though, if that’s lamplight outside. Just for a moment. But it was familiar.

any help?’

And then, when I found my window smashed, there was a

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor. ‘No doubt she’s got ahead of herself terrible smell. And the voice…’

again. Thank you very much.’

‘Voice?’

Mrs Crithin smiled and turned back to her audience,

‘It said my name. But not Trevithick. It called me by the already geared up for another saucy Christmas tale.

name of my old character. It called me Nightshade.’

The Doctor threaded his way through the crowded room

‘What did you do?’

to Trevithick. The old man drained his pint and looked at The old man harrumphed a little. ‘I’m ashamed to say I the Doctor expectantly.

passed out.’

‘Any luck?’

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‘It seems my friend may have gone up to the radio

‘That’s all?’ Hawthorne’s narrow eyes dwindled into telescope. I’d better go and see.’

furious slits. ‘This is a government installation, young lady.

Trevithick nodded and shook hands with the Doctor We can’t just let all and sundry traipse through!’

effusively. ‘Thanks again for your help with Mrs Yeadon.

‘Look...’ said Ace.

Hope to see you again soon.’

‘What I can’t understand is what’s happened to our

‘Yes indeed.’ The Doctor was already turning for the door.

supposedly brilliant security system...’

From his crouched position on the stairs, Robin watched

‘Look!’ cried Ace angrily. ‘That’s what I’ve been trying to first the Doctor and then, after a protracted struggle into his tell you! I found a body outside.’

coat, Trevithick, disappear into the night.

‘A body?’ said Cooper incredulously.

Robin glanced up the stairs at his stepmother’s bedroom

‘Yes! Outside the fence. It was in uniform. Could’ve been door. She was sleeping peacefully now. She’d be all right. If a security guard.’

he could just have a word with the Doctor. Find out where

‘What did it look like then?’ Hawthorne cocked his head he and the girl were staying and get a chance to talk to her.

to one side.

Interesting women didn’t often come to Crook Marsham.

‘I don’t know. He was all rotten. Decomposed.’

With one last, guilty look up the stairs, he pulled on his

‘We’re wasting our time.’

coat and pushed his way outside into the freezing night.

‘Now look,’ said Cooper sternly. ‘If you think you can get out of trouble by making up cock-and-bull stories...’

‘Ace? What kind of a name is that?’ said Hawthorne

‘I saw it!’ yelled Ace.

witheringly.

‘Well, let’s go and have a look, shall we?’ Hawthorne

‘Does it matter?’

pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Ace was alert now, her eyes flashing in agitation. Cooper

‘We can’t,’ sighed Ace hopelessly. ‘It melted away.’

and Hawthorne stood before her with arms crossed like

‘Came and went like a summer cloud, did it?’

angry parents.

‘All right, Tom, Leave it. Something’s obviously

‘What does matter, young lady, is what you’re doing in happened.’ Cooper turned and looked Ace in the eye. ‘If the this compound. Suppose you tell us that?’ Cooper’s face was phones were working I’d call the police. As it is, just think set in a stern frown.

yourself lucky...’

‘Look, I told you. I was in the village with my friend...’

There was a deafening screech as the entire room flooded

‘This...”Doctor”?’

with power. The strip lights flickered, died, and were

‘The Doctor, yes. He went off to the monastery and I got replaced by orange emergency lamps. Data screed across bored. I sneaked in here for a look around. That’s all.’

the consoles, forcing gauges and needles into irrational regions of the scale.

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‘Here we go again!’ cried Cooper, hands flapping at her

‘Her too.’ Ace indicated Holly with a nod of her head.

sides. ‘Quick, you - Ace - make yourself useful. Go to the Vijay jumped out of bed, clutching a blanket around his living quarters.’

waist and scanning the room for his discarded clothes.

‘I don’t- ‘

‘That’s OK. She needs the rest. I don’t want to wake her.

‘Left, left, then right,’ called Hawthorne, throwing himself You can go now - er?’

into a swivel chair as paper poured from the printout to the

‘Ace.’

floor.

‘Right.’ Vijay smiled. ‘Thanks.’

‘Get Vijay,’ said Cooper, ‘and Holly if she’s awake. Their Ace let her eyes linger briefly on his finely muscled chest rooms are marked. No time to explain!’

and then, mentally admonishing herself for her wandering

‘But...’

thoughts, exited.

‘Go!’

She ran all the way back to the control room where Ace scrambled to her feet and dashed off into the interior Cooper ushered her into a chair. Both she and Hawthorne of the building. Emergency lights flashed around every were totally engrossed in the eruption of data

which blank wall, heightening the hectic atmosphere. She raced crackled like a bonfire around the huge room.

past lockers and storerooms, even a TV lounge, before she spotted a door marked ‘H. Kidd’.

Sleep was a beautiful release and Betty Yeadon, for once Ace paused, panting for breath, knocked and threw open free of her nightmares, wallowed in it. Muted colours the door. Empty. She cursed.

flashed across her closed lids as her breathing settled into a The next door bore the legend ‘Vijay Degun’ and a sign soft, regular pattern.

cannibalized from a cardboard ‘Fragile - With Care’ notice The room around her was empty, Robin’s vacated chair which now read ‘agile - Wit...’

pushed back against the wall. The frosty night outside Ace didn’t knock this time.

whispered around the drawn curtains.

Inside the room, Holly and Vijay lay curled naked against Betty turned over in her sleep as a bubble of memory one another, a mess of blankets pulled haphazardly around floated to the surface of her unconscious. There was a dull them.

thud somewhere below.

Ace cleared her throat in embarrassment and Vijay sat up Plash

sharply, his thick black fringe obscuring his eyes.

The curtains stirred slightly and there was another smaller

‘I’m sorry,’ she said quietly. ‘They want you in the control sound, as if bare winter branches were scraping at the room. There’s some sort of emergency.’

window.

Vijay looked momentarily nonplussed and ran his hand Plash

through his hair as if to wake himself up. ‘Right,’ he said at She opened one eye, feeling the weight of drowsiness last.

gushing through her brain like thick soup.

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Thud

Betty looked at the bottom of the door. A four-panelled, She opened both her eyes and felt suddenly alert. The glossy white door, under which a pool of black sea-water bedside clock ticked loudly.

was slowly forming.

Plash

She tried to speak, call, scream, but her throat tightened Plash

into a rasping croak. All that came out, in a whisper so low Betty pulled herself back to the headboard and dragged she scarcely heard it herself, was a name.

the blankets around her. The rustling sound came again and

‘Alf?’

she glanced feverishly around the room.

From behind the door came a soft, low chuckle.

Thud

Thud

‘Doctor! Doctor, wait!’

She gazed at the closed bedroom door. There were four Robin called after the little figure who’d made amazingly panels in it. A white, glossy door. Silence hissed about her.

rapid progress across the coal-black moor. The moon bled Thud

pale light on to the Doctor’s face as he turned and looked Plash

back. Robin ran to catch up with him, feet sinking into the Thud

mud.

There was something coming up the stairs. Dragging its

‘Hello again,’ said the Doctor as the boy reached him, out feet.

of breath. ‘Shouldn’t you be with your mother?’

Thud

‘It’s OK. She’s sleeping,’ said Robin. ‘I - I just wanted to...

The other sound reminded her of rain-soaked shoes.

well, your friend, the girl...’

Plash

‘Ace?’

She knew who it was. What it was. The dream that wasn’t

‘Is that her name? Ace.’ He turned the name over on his a dream. The wet footprints in the carpet. The terrible tongue like an unfamiliar delicacy.

skeletal grip on her cheek.

‘Her real name’s Dorothy but she wouldn’t thank me for Plash

telling you.’

Thud

‘Well, I just wondered whether...’

Thud

‘Yes?’

The rustling came again. Betty jammed her fist into her The Doctor raised an eyebrow, enjoying the young man’s mouth, eyes bulging in naked terror. Where was Lawrence?

discomfort.

Where was Robin? Where were they?

Robin was saved by a terrible, whooping scream which The footsteps stopped. The door seemed to loom before echoed across the moor like the howl of a wolf. Both he and her, heavy with the presence behind it.

the Doctor jumped in alarm. There was movement about a hundred yards ahead and they turned to make it out. A 126

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small, silhouetted figure was stumbling about, making pressed flat so that his mouth and nose were just two gory incomprehensible gurgling sounds in its throat.

holes, as though he'd been flung against plate glass.

'Come on!' cried the Doctor, grabbing Robin's arm.

The Doctor moved towards the body and gingerly The figure was stationary now, swaying a little in the touched Prudhoe's arm. There was a horrible crack as moonlight and sobbing uncontrollably. The Doctor pulled tissues split apart and clouds of opaque vapour flooded the out a torch from his capacious pockets and swept the beam little niche. The Doctor gagged as the smell engulfed him.

on to a blanched, panicky face, the stern mouth flecked with Robin turned and ran outside, hurling himself down on the spit, the eyes two perfect circles of fear like bullet holes in heather.

ice.

Pushing a handkerchief into his mouth, the Doctor forced

'It's Mrs Prudhoe!' hissed Robin.

himself to watch and shuddered involuntarily as the body

'The missing man's wife?'

rippled and fell inwards, trickling away into the ground.

Robin nodded vigorously. The Doctor placed a reassuring The Doctor remained a few minutes more and then hand on the old woman's

wrinkled brow. ‘All right. It’s all stepped outside, drinking in the frosty air with relief. He right now, Mrs Prudhoe. Mrs Prudhoe? What’s wrong?

patted Robin on the shoulder as the boy knelt there, What happened?’

doubled up.

She stared at the Doctor but seemed to look right through

‘What… what happened to him?’

him, struggling against the firm grip of his hands, her The Doctor shook his head and looked up at the sky mouth working away in silent protest.

above them. He sighed heavily. Would there never be an Sensing his ministrations were futile, the Doctor let Mrs end to it?

Prudhoe go and she shambled off into the darkness, weeping.

Trevithick turned up the collar of his coat as a chilly wind

‘Doctor! Over here!’

from the moor shivered through the village. It was bloody Robin was some way off now. He had found the little cold. He rubbed his gloved hands together and grumbled a enclave in the rocks surrounded by stubby trees. The Doctor little under his breath.

picked out the area with his torch and the beam bounced Christmas Eve tomorrow! In all the excitement, he’d over black moor and grey stone as he advanced. He could almost forgotten. But now he could sense that lovely, feel Robin’s breath by him as he turned the beam into the indefinable crisp-ness in the air. Was it snow? Would they hole.

have snow for Christmas? He looked forward to that

‘Jesus,’ cried Robin, taking a step backwards as the torch beautiful, serene quiet which heavy snow always brought to revealed the appalling sight within.

the world and the satisfying crump his steel-toed winter Jack Prudhoe lay in a heap, legs and arms snapped, boots would make in virgin drifts. Nothing quite like it.

paunchy skin streaked with purple scratches. His face was 128

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If memory served, they'd finished the last Nightshade Trevithick caught a smell on the breeze, recognised it and around Christmas. December 1958, wasn't it? Only ten years, felt his stomach heave. He turned and ran. About fifty yards yet it seemed like a lifetime. He could remember the from the Dalesview Home, something stepped out into the producer's party afterwards: the usual mix of sentiment and road.

jollity, too much booze and too many false promises to keep It couldn't be. It couldn't be.

in touch. He'd walked home that night knowing it was the It was under the yellow streetlamp just as it had been the end of an era. Things were never quite the same again.

night before.

But at least his public remembered him! Perhaps they

'No!' Trevithick gasped, his lopsided mouth falling open.

were planning a reunion. Or a new series? Or (he pulled up The creature was almost seven feet tall, a shiny, black-sharp at the thought) This Is Your Life!

carapaced body like a cockroach mounted on grasshopper By God, they'd have to do some detective work to find all legs. Its massive bristly head rolled back and forth the old buggers he'd worked with.

inquisitively as its mandibles juddered and clicked before it.

William Jarrold had nipped off to America to take Trevithick gawped, feeling his heart knock against his ribs Hollywood by storm. Went down like a lead balloon, like a racing engine.

according to the papers.

It was impossible.

Poor Jimmy Reynolds was dead, of course. Tragic really.

He pressed himself back against the hedge and yelled as But only the good die young. That's why I've lasted so long, the creature lunged at him.

the old man laughed to himself.

It pulled back, the muscles of its neck bulging through its There was a scuttling sound nearby and Trevithick skin. Trevithick threw himself to the ground and rolled over, stopped, his ears pricked.

repeating the fall he'd learned for The Sword of Araby.

'Hello?'

Surprised at his own agility, Trevithick struggled to his There was another sound, so like wind-rattled branches feet and pelted back the way he'd come. He could taste rust that he turned to the high hedge which grew by the in his mouth and a crippling stitch beginning to develop in pavement.

his groin as he clattered and slid across the icy pavement.

'Who's there?'

The creature scurried behind him, its great muscular legs His heart pumped a little faster. George Lowcock had said rippling with effort.

it might be kids who'd smashed the window. There were all It wasn't true. Couldn't be.

sorts of lunatics about these days and if they could tear up Trevithick saw the pub, lights ablaze in the taproom.

Grosvenor Square, why should they hesitate at attacking an There were still people in there. Had to be. Had to be.

old codger like him?

He was a few feet from the door when a brittle mandible

'I know you're there,' he said firmly. The scuttling sound wrenched him backwards, slicing through his jacket and came again, like claws on glass.

waistcoat. He fell heavily and lay there, winded, as the 130

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creature reared over him, its head thrashing about as if in and jammed the end of his torch into the box which triumph and sticky fluid pumping from its maw on to his exploded in a flurry of sparks. The fence slid slowly open.

face.

The Doctor smiled, lifted his hat and ushered Robin through.

Trevithick screamed.

‘After you.’

The creature flared with light as Lawrence Yeadon’s car Robin looked up at the dish dominating the sky above swung crazily around the corner. Trevithick took his chance them. He felt an unpleasant sensation of falling backwards, and rolled again. The car seemed to be almost out of control the kind of insecurity he suffered crossing suspension and screeched across the pavement, lurching to a stop bridges or gazing up at skyscrapers.

inches from the pub door.

The Doctor pushed open the double doors and they found Trevithick looked up. The creature was gone. He got themselves in a featureless corridor, its cold walls stained shakily to his feet and stumbled over to the car. The doors orange by the emergency lights. Through the glass of the opened simultaneously, Lawrence and Lowcock almost inner door they could see the frantic activity within the falling out of their seats on to the frozen ground.

control room. A deafening chatter of machinery and There were people emerging from the pub. The two men computer printouts seeped from under the door. The Doctor gripped the car for support and took great gulps of air.

paused on the threshold.

Trevithick wandered up to them, feeling his exposed chest

‘Now, Robin. Circumstances like these demand tact and where the

mandible had seared the skin.

patience. Understand?'

'Did you see it? Did you?' he begged.

Robin nodded dumbly, then the Doctor barged through Lowcock turned his pale face to the old man. He looked the door, doffed his hat and said, 'Good evening, I'm the confused and frightened.

Doctor. Hello, Ace. Having trouble?'

'We couldn't get out of the village. Couldn't get out...'

Robin didn't think much of the Doctor's ideas on diplomacy.

The Doctor approached the perimeter fence with Robin Cooper and Hawthorne barely looked up from their work.

scurrying behind him.

Vijay looked at the Doctor in blank astonishment.

'What happened to him, Doctor? What's going on?'

'Come in! Come in!' called Hawthorne. 'The more the The Doctor waved his hand airily. 'I don't know, I don't merrier!'

know. We must find Ace. Make sure she's all right.'

'Your friend, I presume?' Cooper looked up from stabbing Robin eyed the squat grey box which controlled the a row of buttons. Ace ran to the Doctor and gave him a hug security system. The red light winked in the darkness.

of welcome.

'You need a special key to get in there,' said Robin.

'Are you all right, Ace?' he said, furrowing his brow. She The Doctor looked at him impatiently, prised off the front nodded and smiled. Robin hung awkwardly to one side and of the box, re-threaded two blue wires, pulled out a third then offered his hand in greeting.

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‘Hello again.’

Vijay didn’t have to consult his figures. ‘It’s the Bellatrix

‘Hi.’

double in Orion 24. We’ve been monitoring the whole They grinned at each other and looked at the floor constellation for four weeks now.’

simultaneously.

‘But the other signals are completely different,’ continued Ace was reminded a little of Mike, the young man who Cooper. ‘Just a stream of nonsense. It can’t be coming from had wooed her and, ultimately, betrayed her in their battle Bellatrix.’

against the Daleks. Robin had the same cheeky smile, the

‘Possibly not, possibly not,’ mused the Doctor. He looked same sort of piercing eyes, although green rather than blue.

about the room, eyes flashing. Ace knew this expression.

There was also the suggestion of something dark about

‘He’s thinking,’ she said to Robin.

Robin, some indication of deep currents under the still The boy nodded. ‘I’m Robin, by the way.’

surface. Ace looked forward to exploring.

‘Ace.’ She looked at him inquisitively. ‘So... how did you The Doctor was already at one of the consoles and ripped meet up with the Doctor again?’

off a printout as it pooled at his feet. ‘White dwarf. Double.

‘I think you were supposed to meet him in the pub...?’

Hmm... you’ve got an exploding star on your hands.’

‘I got held up.’

‘Now look here…’ began Hawthorne.

‘Anyway,’ Robin continued, ‘my stepmum’s been taken ill

‘Oh shut up, Tom,’ barked Cooper. ‘We need all the help and the Doctor lent a hand.’

we can get just now. We know about the star, Doctor…’

‘I didn’t know he was that kind of Doctor,’ said Ace,

‘It’s a big one, isn’t it?’

grinning.

Cooper nodded. ‘It’s the only bit of solid information we Hawthorne was still looking daggers at the Doctor, have. It’s the rest of this stuff that doesn’t make sense.’

obviously displeased at the way the little stranger had The Doctor joined her by a row of display screens and insinuated himself into the proceedings.

gazed down at the fluctuating figures.

The clock which Holly had so patiently watched the

‘Massive energy levels of some kind.’

previous night ticked loudly to a quarter past ten. Once

‘It’s flooding the systems. We can’t cope with it. We can’t again, with startling speed, the instruments whined to a halt; trace it.’

gauges and monitors shuddered back to their normal, quiet Vijay joined them. ‘But it has to be coming from the same watchfulness.

sector as the nova. We’ve had the telescope trained on the Ace was reminded of the atmosphere in a launderette same area since all this began.’

when all the machines finish their washing cycle. The strip The Doctor drummed his fingers on the console. ‘And lights faltered and then sprang back to life, allowing the where’s your nova located?’

orange emergency lamps to shut down. Everyone looked around as the unaccustomed silence returned.

‘Same as before,’ said Cooper. ‘How long did it last?’

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Hawthorne glanced at the monitor and pushed back a Robin looked up. ‘No, it was Jack Prudhoe. An old bloke strand of greasy hair. ‘Just under three quarters of an hour.’

from the village. His wife found him out there. When the

‘Longer than last night,’ said Vijay.

Doctor touched him he just sort of... melted away.’

The Doctor tossed his duffel coat on to Hawthorne’s chair

‘There, you see. Just like I told you!’ cried Ace and plunged his hands into the reams of paper which had triumphantly.

tumbled to the floor.

‘Massive tissue collapse,’ said the Doctor gravely. ‘I’ve Cooper sighed heavily, thrust her hands into the pockets never seen anything quite like it and I’ve seen a few things of her lab coat and cleared her throat. ‘I’m Christine Cooper.

in my time.’

This is Tom Hawthorne. Vijay Degun. Your friend here tells

‘And the smell...’ Robin sat down heavily.

me you’re a scientist?’

‘Yes. That too.’ The Doctor sat up and placed his hands on The Doctor didn’t look up from his scrutiny of the papers.

the console before him. ‘Whatever happened to Mr Prudhoe

‘Doctor!’ urged Ace.

triggered some sort of instantaneous corruption. Like

‘Hmm? Oh yes. Scientist, explorer, philanthropist, general exposing a sealed coffin to the air.’

do-gooder. That’s me.’

‘Does anyone else know about this?’ said Cooper,

‘Well, as I said, we’d be grateful for any help.’

frowning.

The Doctor gave her an intense look, took off his hat and The Doctor shook his head. ‘No. But your friendly local sat down in a swivel chair. ‘Help? Yes... I’ll help. I always bobby and Robin’s father have gone off to get help for Mrs do.’

Yeadon. If they can sort out the communications problem

‘Doctor. There’s something going on...’ began Ace.

too we might start to get somewhere.’

‘Yes. I know.’

Hawthorne grimaced and started to clean his glasses with

‘What d’you mean?’ said Hawthorne, plucking the the hem of his cardigan. ‘Well, I for one reckon we should Doctor’s coat from his chair with distaste.

think pragmatically and try to make some sense of this data.

The Doctor crossed his legs on the console. ‘Telephones Bodies or no bodies. There’s nothing much else we can do.’

that don’t work. Energy from space. People seeing ghosts.

Vijay shrugged. ‘I agree with Dr Hawthorne.’

That sort of thing. Now young Robin and myself have come It was probably the first time he ever had.

across a body on the moor.’

‘A security guard?’ asked Cooper.

Holly felt as if she’d been drugged. Sleep hung heavily

‘What?’

about her, plucking her back into blissful unconsciousness

‘This young lady claims to have found the body of a whenever she stirred. Until her head hit the downy pillow, security guard. We seem to have lost one.’

she hadn’t realised how totally exhausted she was. There’d

‘That’s very careless of you.’

been a full day on duty followed by her sympathetic relief of Vijay. Then the crisis had kept her up until almost seven 136

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in the morning. Sliding between freshly laundered sheets, sharing. Sometimes she felt her love for him like a hot she had fallen almost instantly asleep.

physical weight, pressing through her ribs, and she would At some time during the day, she’d been aware of Vijay smile without quite knowing why.

getting into bed beside her and had snuggled up to the By the spring of 1962 they were contemplating marriage.

warm pressure of his body. Now he seemed to have gone Holly had graduated with honours from Cambridge and again but Holly couldn’t be sure. She was dreaming or was considering a research post at a physics lab in Scotland.

remembering or both.

James, ever the optimist, was using his English degree to Uncle Louis was there, his face stern, his arms folded.

bludgeon his way into a position as junior reporter on a Holly was grinning sheepishly, James by her side. They Northumbrian paper. They were scouting for a house on the were both seventeen.

Scottish border and it looked as if they would see each other There

had been some sort of fuss about them going off most weekends and alternate Wednesdays for the first few together, James's mum ringing up Louis to enquire where months. Holly had just arrived in Scotland when she got the the 'young lovers' had got to. James, she explained, had his call from Louis. She was so pleased to hear his voice that she exams to worry about and couldn't waste his time dallying babbled on for a full minute before registering the heavy with girls.

silence at his end. Then it came. A simple, leaden sentence.

In truth, they had been down by the brook, enjoying the

'Listen, love. I've got some bad news. I'm sorry. I don't forbidden thrill of first kisses. The air was summer sweet.

know how to say this. It's James. There's been an accident...'

Holly had let James's fingers trace the outline of her eyes, She knew at once that he was dead and felt numbness lips and slim neck. They were young, in love, and, that night, rising through her. There were no tears, not then, just a hot, in trouble.

dry emptiness. The phone had hung limply in her hand for Louis had shouted at her, worried about local gossip and hours as the room darkened around her.

how a young girl could get herself a reputation. It might be Well, that was over now. Six years gone. She had 1957 but there were still standards to maintain. Adolescent managed to continue at the lab. Pushed herself into her anger boiled within her, pouting her lips, quickening her work. Done well. Very brave. Everyone had said so.

breathing.

In the last year or so, she had finally started to relax again, But, against all the odds, it had worked out. Holly and making new friends and generally enjoying the loosening James went on seeing each other all through the summer.

up of society which the decade was bringing. Now there The months lengthened to years. University and separation was the tracking station. And Vijay...

seemed only to deepen their affection. She felt incomplete She did love him, she knew that. But it was a different sort without him.

of love than the sort she'd felt for James. Perhaps a little Holidays became times of unadulterated joy, brimming more spiky. A little less sure. But different...

over with silly talk, passion and the indefinable pleasure of Something tugged at her foot.

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Holly blended it into her dream and imagined herself tripping over a paving stone. She jumped and was awake.

The room was overwhelmingly dark. No light peeked under the door from the corridor beyond and the heavy curtains were tightly drawn. She glanced at the luminous Chapter Six

hands of her alarm clock. A quarter to eleven. There was some pressure on her feet. She stirred her legs under the blankets, thinking, for a moment, that a cat must be lying there. But there were no cats in the station. And the weight was too heavy. She felt her heart rate increase. The pressure on her feet shifted slightly.

If only she could make out something in the darkness. Her Billy Coote was snoring loudly, an old grey army blanket mouth went dry. She swallowed.

slung over his skinny form. The monk's cell in which he lay There was a sound, very close by, as if someone were was bare and functional, although someone had once had breathing in her ear. Or stirring fallen leaves. Holly reached the presence of mind to install a radiator in the far corner: a out and found the trailing cord of the lamp switch. She fussy thirties thing convoluted like intestines and painted a pressed the button and a little sun of weak orange light depressing cream colour.

exploded in the room.

Billy snorted and coughed loudly in a hacking spasm, There was a man sitting on the end of her bed, dressed in what his dad always called 'the workhouse cough'. Too a sports jacket and tapered

trousers. He had short, blond many Woodbines and draughty bus shelters, some doctor hair, finely chiselled features and his broad hands were had once told him. But never mind that, he'd had some folded neatly across his lap. He was smiling.

good times on the road. No responsibilities, nobody trying Holly drew back with a startled cry, her mind spinning in to tie him down. It hadn't been so bad...

disbelief. She tried to form words. But the man just put his That morning, he had run down into Crook Marsham full finger to his lips and smiled benignly.

of tales about a funny police box - tales that had been It may have been the shadowy light, but there was a greeted with the usual mixture of scepticism and disquieting blankness in the man's gaze; his eyes were black amusement. Somewhat forlornly, he had wandered over to and opaque like unpolished jet. He reached out and took the monastery where he knew he was guaranteed a bed and Holly's hand in his, the palm warm and reassuring. Then he a free meal once or twice a month, sometimes more if he giggled.

pushed his luck.

The Abbot always treated him kindly but didn't like to see him hanging around. Not very Christian of him in Billy's 140

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opinion. No, his true friend there was Brother Alec, a former In the village, however, he was relegated to the position of soldier who had spent a good while sleeping rough in his local idiot: someone with whom to pass the time of day, buy time.

a drink for at Christmas and use as a bogeyman to frighten He understood Billy's way of life, letting him stay in the errant children. Get to bed now, or Billy will come and get monastery and doling out some of the monks' leftovers.

you!

'As long as you don't make a habit of it,' he would always He was

happy, though, happy enough. If it wasn't for the say, laughing at his feeble joke.

headaches.

Tonight, Alec couldn't really turn him down. It was They'd first appeared some months previously: sick, dull, freezing cold (Billy had chuckled at the conspicuous thumping pains at the base of his skull, sometimes corduroys showing beneath Alec's robes) and looked like it accompanied by blinding lights.

might snow. He could hear the wind from the moor now as He was seeing things too. Nothing he could get a grip on.

he drifted in and out of sleep, the thin, arrow-slit window Colours and places, lit up like Christmas trees, that swam rattling in its frame.

and shuddered in his mind.

There had been a time when his opinion counted for After the attacks he would feel hollow and utterly something in Crook Marsham and the surrounding districts.

miserable, a profound, stomach-deep depression which took Right up until the War he had been a bit of a local celebrity, days to lift. It was all very worrying. He would talk to consulted on all manner of things from the possibility of a Brother Alec about it in the morning.

dry summer to the sex of unborn children. After all, he was Abbot Winstanley heard it first, a low, low moan, drifting the seventh son of a seventh son. More or less.

down the corridors of the monastery. He opened his eyes Well, he had the 'gift' certainly, even though it was a bit and listened intently. The sound came again, haltingly - a erratic at times. His weather forecasts in particular brought desperate, shuddering wail like the cry of a lost soul or the down the wrath of local farmers and, after predicting a mild mournful song of a whale.

winter in '63, his services had been spurned in favour of the Winstanley remembered childhood stories about - what BBC's.

were they called? - yes, the Gabriel Ratchets. A celestial Sometimes, though, an image so pure and unsullied horde of wretched spirits forever doomed to walk the earth.

would spring into his mind that he could announce with This was how they might sound, he thought. Desperate, certainty its coming to pass. It had been that way over the hopeless, forgotten.

Abdication crisis (Billy had heard the King's departing He got up and padded to the door of his cell, pressing his speech in his mind a whole year before its broadcast), hand against the dark wood.

Churchill's death, and even the date of the last election It came again, more substantial this time, like a breath of (which had won him ten bob).

wind blowing suddenly fierce. Winstanley slipped on his 142

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shoes and opened the door. The corridor beyond was The man's shape seemed to shift and change, his skin completely empty.

blurring and glittering like burnished metal. Light began to He looked up the passageway towards the Great Hall and trail from his hands and eyes.

then down towards the kitchens. Nothing. Only a hollow, Holly turned leaden eyes to gaze into his face. The mouth silent darkness.

was huge now, red lips and teeth glistening with spit.

He caught his breath sharply as the moan sounded right

'Holly!'

by him, fluttering the hem of his habit and creeping down She turned. Vijay had strolled into the room and was the back of his neck. He shivered, wishing he were not alone staring in disbelief at the miasmic cloud into which Holly in that sad corridor. If only the Doctor had returned.

seemed to be sinking.

Winstanley had derived great comfort from the newcomer's

'Holly!' he called again, desperately thrashing his arms at arrival.

the insubstantial entity. There was a crackle of energy and Somewhere, deep in the monastery, a heavy door creaked Vijay was tossed across the room, hitting the wall with and slammed shut. Winstanley jumped out of his skin and tremendous force. He picked himself up, clutching his ducked back into his room, shutting his own door with bruised chest, and stumbled towards Holly. He called her sweaty hands.

name again and again, his voice rasping with despair.

Eventually she turned her sleepy head.

Billy Coote's door swung shut of its own accord and the

'Vijay?'

old man's face jerked in response. The air about his sleeping The cloud seemed to retreat; its staggering brightness body seemed curiously stirred, whispering around the dimming like a sputtering candle.

grizzled locks of hair, teasing at the wide-open, staring eyes Holly forced herself to think of Vijay, their first meeting, which had turned as black and opaque as coal in a their first kiss. He was solid, concrete, substantial. Her snowman's face.

wavering consciousness strained to lock on to his image as he swam at the edge of her vision. She was suddenly Holly felt herself falling. The man's grip on her arm had paralysed with fear, her eyes bulging.

become intense, painful; his hand felt hot and searing as if it Vijay waded across the room, the pulsing cloud wrapping were burning into her skin. His face seemed to balloon diminishing tendrils around him. A thick, viscous fluid before her heavy eyes, the mouth expanding into a gaping settled on his skin, running in rivulets into his nose and hole.

mouth. He spat disgustedly and wiped at his coated eyes.

Holly could see things in his opaque eyes and felt Holly could feel a dull pulsing in her head and pressure strangely comfortable. It would be so easy just to let go. So on her skull as if an unseen hand were forcing her down.

easy...

It was too late, she told herself. She was lost.

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Vijay's face rose before her like a painted mask, furrowed Hot tears welled in her eyes and rolled down her flushed with concern and anxiety.

face. 'I love you,' she said simply. 'But he meant so much to Too late.

me. You must understand.'

She was suddenly alert and gulping air with pistol-shot

'I do,' said Vijay, stroking her hair. 'I do.'

clarity. Vijay was holding her tightly in his arms and she Whatever he had seen in the room was certainly unearthly.

blinked over his shoulder at the room, now partially lit by A cloud of light and energy, like a delicate sea creature, the corridor lamps. The man was gone.

trailing crackling fronds. It had terrified and astonished him.

'Are you OK? Holly? What happened?'

And, just for a moment, he'd made out a human face, its She shook her head. Slowly at first and then with features writhing and twisting in fury.

unnatural speed, she began gabbling a stream of Vijay put his arm around Holly and together they incomprehensible words.

shambled down the corridor.

Vijay's hand cracked across her face and she fell, sobbing, The gaudy wallpaper in the TV room was, Ace surmised, into his embrace.

an attempt to bring a touch of homeliness to the otherwise Vijay picked her up bodily, forced her into some clothes sterile station. There were a few cheap prints pinned to the and managed to struggle out into the corridor. He threw her walls and a dog-eared poster of

Che Guevara. Skinny over his shoulder and began to walk back to the control Christmas streamers pocked with drawing-pin holes were room. But Holly pulled away and slid to the floor.

ranged haphazardly across the ceiling.

'All right, Hol. It's OK now,' said Vijay soothingly.

After the crisis in the control room, Ace and Robin had She raised bloodshot eyes to him.

been allocated the TV room as their billet for the night. Vijay

'It was James! It was him!'

had been very kind, helping with bedding and refreshment,

'James?'

although he still seemed a little embarrassed in Ace's She grabbed Vijay's hand.

company. She thought of that old gag, 'I didn't recognise

'My fiancé. You remember?'

you with your clothes on'.

Vijay nodded dumbly.

For a while, she and Robin had watched TV, or rather,

'He died. He's dead,' Holly cried, her voice hoarse. 'But Robin had watched TV and she had watched him. Blue light he was there in the room. And he wanted me. I could feel it!'

from the screen bounced across his features as he sat Vijay sighed heavily and folded her into his arms, cooing entranced by a programme bravely entitled Colour me Pop!

softly.

Ace liked the curve of his jaw in the moody light and the

'All right, Hol. Don't talk now.'

way his Brian Jones fringe hung untidily in his eyes.

She flashed angry eyes. ‘I want to! I want to talk! James is A youthful strutting figure had popped on to the screen dead. How could he be here? How could he?’

and Ace laughed out loud.

‘What is it?’ asked Robin, smiling.

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‘Is that who I think it is?’

A thick mist hung about the base of the Minster, gathering Robin frowned. ‘Mick Jagger? Yeah.’

in eddies inside the crumbling yellow niches.

‘You should see him now. He’s well past it.’

Tim Medway strolled to his car, rubbing his hands

‘What do you mean?’

together to keep warm and looking around him at the Ace bit her tongue. She had forgotten where she was. And awakening city. He smiled.

when.

Daylight was bleeding through the dark blue of night and

‘Nothing,’ she said quietly.

milk bottles greeted the morning with a chorus of chinking.

Sometime after eleven, they had settled down for the Coloured bulbs hung across the street like strings of paste night, their beds separated by a pile of coats, boots and jewellery, swaying slightly in the cold wind.

Ace’s rucksack. Robin clicked off the light.

This was Medway's first time in York. Arriving mid-Ace heard him undressing in the darkness and grinned to afternoon the previous day, he'd found himself so herself. His teeth chattered as he plunged beneath the thick enchanted by the labyrinth of winding streets and tea shops blankets.

that he'd decided to postpone his appearance in Crook Ace was dog tired but her brain refused to quieten down.

Marsham. Old Trevithick could wait for his interview.

An image of that vile corpse out on the moor sprang into Probably had nothing better to do anyway.

her mind and she shook her head to get rid of it. She didn't Instead, Medway had buttoned up his overcoat and want to think about that.

thrown a long scarf around his neck, enjoying the Instead, she thought about the nameless excitement she undercurrent of Christmas which bubbled within him.

was experiencing. The gentle sound of Robin's breathing Bay-windowed shops glittered with antiques and wooden sent a tingle of pleasure coursing through her. She could toys, motley collections of old ship's instruments, Victorian hear the ticking of his eyelashes and knew that he was as dolls, angels, rocking horses and merry-go-rounds.

wide awake as she.

It was like some childhood ideal, he thought to himself,

'I know this sounds a terrible cliche...' Robin announced grinning in excitement: a composite of Dickens, John suddenly.

Masefield and C. S. Lewis, resonant of a kind of Christmas Ace put her hands behind her head. 'Try me.'

he had never known yet seemed to remember all the same.

'You're not like any other girl I know.'

His reflection, tall, tanned and good-looking, stared back Ace barked a laugh.

at him from every window.

‘Sorry,’ he grinned.

He’d eaten well, drunk just a little too much and stumbled

‘No. Don’t apologise. I like you too.’ There was a deep to his hotel through streets bunched so close together the and satisfying silence.

buildings on either side almost touched. There was a frost ring sparkling around the moon and the distant, brassy 148

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music of a Salvation Army band drifted towards him. He

‘Edmund Trevithick,’ he announced to himself. ‘Born 12

had wished everyone and anyone a very merry Christmas.

May 1898. Educated Repton School, blah, blah...’

He turned a page and pulled out a couple of photographs of the young Trevithick.

‘No formal training. Joined Acton Rep. 1923. Went to Hollywood in

the thirties. Came back for WWII.

Distinguished Service Medal.' Medway pulled a face, surprised.

'Films include: Flames of Passion (1946), Sword of Araby (1949), The Man from the Ministry (1951), There's Someone in My Trousers! (1965). Best known for his TV work in the last years of his career, especially the popular Nightshade serials (1953-58). Retired in 1966. Family: Married Margaret (d. 1956), one daughter Paula (d. 1967) and granddaughter.'

Medway closed the file, put the car into gear and reversed into the misty street.

When the confirmation had come from Jill Mason he'd Now it was Christmas Eve and he had woken early, watched some of the old man's work. Nightshade he crisscrossing his hands behind his head and listening remembered well, of course, but he was most impressed by intently to the peal of bells.

Trevithick's tremendous output of television plays and his When he found the car, it was rimed with frost and he delightful sparring with Gilbert Harding on What's My Line?

had scraped away at the windscreen with a little plastic All in all, he was rather looking forward to the interview.

spade until it was clear.

It would certainly bring a touch of excitement into the old He let the car tick over for a while, warm air blasting boy's retirement.

through the interior, and took out a brand-new map from the glove compartment.

Edmund Trevithick picked up his umpteenth glass of Crook Marsham was six miles to the west. Shouldn't take whiskey with a shaky hand. Early light blotched the him long. Time for a nice leisurely breakfast in the village taproom carpet in pools of milky blue.

before he made his way to the - what was it called? - the Lowcock and Lawrence Yeadon lay sleeping in the Dalesview Residential Home.

positions they had assumed upon entering The Shepherd's Medway switched on the windscreen wiper and pulled Cross the previous night. Both had collapsed as if utterly out Trevithick's file from his

briefcase.

exhausted, causing grave concern amongst the remaining 150

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customers. They had fallen into a deep sleep, resisting all Lawrence did too. He almost lost control of the car. We attempts to get them to bed. Trevithick had taken charge, stopped for a bit and then tried to carry on but it was no bringing blankets and pillows from the airing cupboard and good. It was like a physical barrier stopping us getting out.

sending the old man with the arthritic hands to check on We were both sick in the car.'

Betty. He had returned, saying her door was locked and it Trevithick frowned. 'Anything else?'

seemed wise not to disturb her.

Lowcock nodded slowly. 'Oh aye. Plenty. That's why we Trevithick himself, however, had not slept well. His mind came tearing back here like a couple of nutters. We both felt fizzed with unanswered questions. Events had been curious this... terror.' He threw up his hands hopelessly. 'That's the enough before but now! That creature... It was fantastic.

only way I can describe it. Overwhelming terror. Hysterical He heard a mumbling groan behind him and turned to we were. As if something was coming over the moor to get see Lowcock stirring in his blanket-covered chair. The us. I've never been so scared in my whole bloody life.'

policeman's lively, humorous face now seemed heavily He finished off the whiskey.

jowled and tired. He rubbed his eyes and looked blearily

'George.' Trevithick put a hand on the policeman's arm.

about him.

“There’s something happening in this village. I think it’s Trevithick pushed a whiskey into his hand and he drank beyond any of our understanding, but we’ve got to do it gratefully.

something. Pool our resources. Get all the facts together.’

‘What happened out there?’ said Trevithick, immediately Lowcock grimaced. ‘What facts? What do you think is pouring another drink.

happening?’

Lowcock gulped it down and waved his hand about.

‘I don’t know. Listen. I know this is going to sound

‘Don’t know. How long have we been out?’

incredible, but, last night, when I was walking home…’

Trevithick looked at his watch. ‘It’s a quarter past eight.

‘How’s Betty?’ said Lowcock suddenly. ‘Christ, I forgot all You got back about half past ten last night and you’ve been about her. How is she?’

asleep ever since. We couldn’t wake you.’

Trevithick put up his hands. ‘It’s all right. I sent someone Lowcock shook his head and rubbed his face, his cheeks up to relieve young Robin but he’d locked the door. We making a slapping sound like wet liver. ‘We got as far as the didn’t want to disturb her. She’s fine, I’m sure. But listen, moor road,’ he said at last, cradling the whiskey glass in his last night…’

hands, ‘and we were just talking about who we should Lawrence sat bolt upright in his chair, blinking his eyes in contact in York. Then…’

confusion. He looked at Lowcock and Trevithick with a Trevithick looked up expectantly.

puzzled frown as if unsure of who they were. Then he

‘Then?’

threw aside his blanket and clattered across the room to the

‘I felt it first. Sickness. Nausea. Waves of it. Like we were stairs.

on a rolling ship in a storm. I felt awful. And I could see

‘Lol, it’s all right!’ called Lowcock, getting to his feet.

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There was grim determination in Lawrence’s tired face as Lawrence sat down calmly on his side of the bed and he sprinted up the stairs to the bedroom. He glanced down folded back the eiderdown. Betty Yeadon glared back at absently at the carpet which seemed to be wet through.

him, her features horribly contorted and stretched back like

‘Betty?’ He hammered on the door. ‘Betty? Are you all perished rubber. Broken capillaries zig-zagged across her right, love?’

flattened face.

He tried the door. It was locked.

Lawrence let out a howl of grief and made to grab his

‘Robin?’

wife’s shoulders. He jerked back in abject horror as her body His shoes squelched on the sodden carpet.

shattered in his hands, the skin falling away in brittle shards.

‘Betty? Robin? Come on, son. Open the door.’

For one awful moment he could feel the bones in her wasted He could hear the alarm clock’s muffled ticking. Lowcock arms but then they too shuddered into nothingness beneath and Trevithick appeared behind him. ‘Betty?’

his fingers.

His voice was tinged with panic. He put his shoulder to Lowcock and Trevithick pulled him off the bed and stared the door and the frame

cracked, sending paint flakes to the in revulsion as the sheets stirred before them. There was a floor.

brief, shocking crack and then the body disappeared in a Lowcock leant his shoulder against the panels and the two cloud of noxious vapour.

men slammed against the woodwork with all their strength.

Lowcock took charge. ‘Get him out! Edmund! Out!

The door split from the hinges outwards and they almost Quick!’

fell into the room.

Trevithick dragged Lawrence from the room whilst the Trevithick hovered in the doorway and stumbled as policeman managed to pull shut the remains of the Lowcock backed into him, pressing his sleeve to his mouth.

shattered door. Kicking open the door of Robin’s room, The room smelled rank. Furniture and clothes lay scattered Trevithick laid the sobbing man on the unmade bed.

and the window was missing entirely, as if punched out Lowcock scrambled across the landing, picked up the cleanly by an unseen hand.

phone, dropped it and then clapped the receiver to his ear.

In the centre of the devastation stood the double bed, There was complete silence. He swore loudly and threw the tilted slightly towards the wall. The thick eiderdown was phone aside.

pulled up to the pillows, completely covering the shape

‘I’m going to the station. Look after him. I won’t be five underneath. A wide green stain like fruit mould was minutes.’

spreading across the embroidery.

Trevithick nodded quickly. ‘Righto.’ He put a comforting Trevithick held his breath and crossed the threshold. He arm around the weeping man beneath him. Posters of noticed at once that the door had not been locked; rather the unfamiliar footballers and pop stars grinned in innocence at woodwork seemed to have expanded, sealing the door like him from the walls. Trevithick felt his breath coming in the

entrance to a tomb.

painful gasps.

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What the hell was going on? And what should he do now?

The Doctor glanced across at Holly and then walked over Events seemed to slipping out of everyone's control. He to her. He sat down on his hands and smiled. 'How are you looked down at Lawrence and suddenly decided he should feeling now?'

pay a little visit to the Dalesview Home. If he could find the Holly nodded as though shaking a loose thought. 'OK.

fella with the arthritic hands and leave Lawrence in his care I'm OK, thanks.'

for a while...

The Doctor chose his next words carefully. 'Vijay said...

There was something in the top drawer of his dressing Vijay said you'd seen something in your room. What, table which just might prove useful...

exactly?'

Holly looked down and sighed. 'I know it sounds silly, The tracking station control room was silent save for the impossible...'

occasional oath of exasperation as the Doctor attempted to

'Never mind how it sounds.' The Doctor put his hand on repair the radio.

hers. Holly took a deep breath.

Beside him sat Holly, now dressed in ski pants and one of

‘I saw my fiancé. He died six years ago. I saw his ghost.’

Vijay’s crewneck sweaters. Her eyes were wide and red The Doctor considered this. ‘How did he appear?’

with crying.

‘What do you mean?’

Vijay had tried to persuade her to return to her bed but

‘Was he as you remembered him?’

she wouldn’t hear of it, preferring to sit awake and aware

‘Oh yes! Very much. He was so alive. I could feel it. It was through the long night.

like he was drawing me into him. It would’ve been so

‘Blast!’ cried the Doctor, throwing aside a delicate easy...’

arrangement of wires.

The Doctor looked straight at her. ‘But you didn’t?’

Cooper was blearily contemplating her first coffee of the

‘There was something wrong. I felt him beginning to morning. ‘What d’you reckon then, Doctor?’

change. I went all sleepy. I could see Vijay coming into the The Doctor sighed and sat down on the end of the bench.

room and I knew I had to get back to him. It was like one of

‘It’s useless. Blown out.’

those nightmares where you’re running through treacle.’

‘Then we’re cut off,’ said Hawthorne flatly as he strode Vijay came in with some freshly made toast and tea. He into the room.

put his arm round Holly.

‘Don’t be so melodramatic, Tom,’ said Cooper. ‘Vijay can

‘And what did you see?’ asked the Doctor.

drive over to York and even if the phones aren't working

'I don't know,' said Vijay. 'Not a person really. A sort of there, we can get through to Cambridge somehow.'

cloud. Colours. Trails in the air. Like I was tripping.'

Hawthorne shrugged.

'Tripping?' The Doctor raised his eyebrows.

Vijay cleared his throat. 'Drugs. You know. Acid. It was like that.'

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'I see,' said the Doctor with mock gravity. He smiled delicately took his hand in hers. His gentle breathing warmly and left them together. Vijay lifted up Holly's face sounded closer as he moved his head towards her face.

to kiss her but she pulled away.

'Come along, Ace. We have to be going!' The Doctor's

'Don't,' she said simply. Vijay sighed heavily and looked voice carried down the corridor from the control room. Ace glumly at the floor.

opened her eyes sharply. Robin pulled away.

The Doctor checked the correlation receivers and turned

'Ace!'

to address Hawthorne. 'What's the tolerance of your safety

'All right!' she bellowed.

cutouts?'

She looked fondly into Robin's eyes and then gave him a Hawthorne sniffed. 'That's what's very odd. They light peck on the cheek. 'Come on, sunshine. Plenty of time.

should've cut out way before the levels they reached.

Let's see what the Doctor's got planned for us.'

Luckily, we've sustained no damage so far.'

He smiled contentedly. Ace bounded from beneath her

'Hmm,' the Doctor mused. He looked around the room.

blankets, unconcerned by her seminakedness. Robin

'Where's Ace?'

blushed in spite of himself.

'Oi,' Ace warned, laughing. 'Close your eyes.'

It had been a long night. Ace had finally managed to cool

'If you insist.'

down her excitement sufficiently to get some sleep, although she'd been aware of raised voices in the corridor at

'All I'm saying,' whispered Hawthorne, 'is that the girl is some point. A woman's voice (hysterical) and what obviously unstable.'

sounded like Vijay's (placating). Ace had been awoken by Cooper stared at him. 'What d'you mean, unstable?'

the tuneless squawking of a rook somewhere outside. The

'I need hardly remind you that she has been seeing things.

sound made her think of bleak, frosty Sundays in the park And that wog boyfriend of hers..."

as a child; bare, black trees against a snow-filled sky.

'I've told you before. I won't have that kind of abuse in She became suddenly aware of Robin watching her and my station!' barked Cooper.

inclined her head on the pile of stuff which had served as The Doctor looked across to where the two scientists were her pillow.

sitting and raised his eyebrows. Hawthorne was keen to

‘Morning,’ she said softly.

keep this conversation quiet.

‘Morning.’ Robin smiled his cheeky smile.

‘All right, all right. I’m sorry. But the boy freely admits to Ace ran her tongue around her mouth and silently wished taking hallucinogenics. You heard him. Whatever Miss Kidd she had a bottle of mouthwash. It tasted like the bottom of a saw was obviously some drug-induced fantasy...’

birdcage in there.

Cooper ruffled her grizzled hair. ‘I’m not so sure.’

Robin reached out his hand and softly touched her face.

‘Well, whatever the reason, do you really think we should She closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation, and then have such people working here?’

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‘Tom!’ Cooper slammed her fists down on to a bench. ‘If ever any of my staff sufficiently compromise themselves so Outside, the day was fine and cold. The Doctor yawned as to prove unreliable I’ll take direct action. Until then, we and strode on, Ace struggling to keep up.

have a bit of an emergency on our hands so can we please

‘Doctor! Hang on!’

get on?’

The Doctor didn’t stop.

Ace and Robin walked into the room grinning. The Doctor Who rattled his cage? thought Ace.

looked at them almost coldly. ‘Ah, there you are. I need to She sighed.

He was keeping something from her as usual.

see the Abbot again up at the monastery, if you'd care to Why did she always let him treat her like this? She thought accompany me?'

of the feel of Robin's hand against her face, his lips on her Robin looked at Ace. 'I really should be getting back.'

cheek. He was real, uncomplicated, human. Until then, she

'Oh.' Her face fell.

hadn't realised just how much she'd missed that quality.

'It's my mum.'

Ace nodded. 'They can be a pain in the arse, can't they?'

On the radio, The Move were urging everyone to call the

'Look, if you're going to the monastery, I can meet you fire brigade. Medway hummed along tunelessly until static there. I'll only be a couple of hours.'

crackled across the frequency.

The smile returned to her face. 'All right then. It's a date.'

With one hand still on the steering wheel, he fiddled with Robin grinned and shrugged. 'Yeah. I suppose it is.'

the dial and cursed as the reception broke up completely.

He kissed her quickly on the cheek and, waving goodbye He clicked the dial to 'off' and the car was silent except for to the rest, left the room.

the gentle hum of the heating.

'Ready?' said the Doctor.

The road ahead emerged on to the moor and he pulled up Cooper began to fumble under a bench. 'Hang on a tick, the car a moment to check his bearings. The windscreen Doctor. I'll need to get in touch with you if there's another wipers thrummed repeatedly as a fine drizzle swept across energy surge.' She popped up again. 'Here.'

the land.

She tossed a small black box across the room to the Doctor, Medway craned his neck and saw the old bus shelter with which he caught nimbly.

the road sign by it.

‘Walkie-talkie,’ she said. ‘Not much of a range but that

‘Crook Marsham. One mile.’ He smiled to himself, might work in our favour. It may have survived the pressing down on the accelerator.

blowout. Anyway, if you hear from me, then we’ll know.’

The road across the moor was narrow and black, rain

‘Thank you.’ The Doctor slipped the device into his glistening on its old surface. Black and white posts studded already bulging pockets. ‘Au revoir.’ He marched out. Ace with hexagonal reflectors appeared every few yards. They gave a general smile to the room and dashed after him.

were quite tall, in order to project, Medway assumed, above

‘What a funny little man,’ said Cooper.

the deep snow which doubtless struck the area.

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He fumbled in the glove compartment and pulled a relation of other families’ real ones, was imbued with the succession of keys, loose change and chocolate wrappers on special aura of the morning, glowingly lit by the light to his lap before finding a crumpled packet of Camels. He filtering through heavy, gold-coloured curtains.

clamped his lips around a cigarette and struck a match off At last, the tea would be ready and presented, with some the dashboard, drinking in the smoke hungrily.

gravitas, to his parents.

Shame he wouldn't be in London for Christmas. It was After deliberately stalling, Medway's mother would say always the best time to be there. Anyway, what did he have

'All right then' and they would line up at the top of the to go back to now? Since Julia left him he'd spent two stairs, squealing with excitement.

Christmases alone with the dog, falling asleep in front of

'Go!'

Alastair Sim on the box and a bottle of whiskey on the table.

And, in a flurry of loosening pyjamas, the two girls and It was a terrible time to be alone. And no one, he thought, boys would hurtle down the stairs, fling open the living-ever thinks it can happen to them. He certainly didn't, not room door and fall upon the mountain of parcels like after the Christmases he used to have.

vultures.

Relatives crowding the kitchen which steamed with Medway smiled to himself. He always meant to get back pudding smells. His father, breath reeking of booze, home for Christmas but somehow never got round to it.

becoming overly affectionate and shaking him by the hand Only one of his sisters still lived near to his parents and she as though he were grown up. Then out would come the beer would dutifully stay over on Christmas Eve, even obeying and attempts would be made to introduce Tim to the the old tea-making ritual. But he imagined it a lonely serious business of alcohol.

Christmas now, the echoes of then-frantic race to the When Christmas Day dawned, young Tim and his brother presents replaced by a grown-up shamble downstairs at ten and sisters would wake ridiculously early, creeping into or eleven o'clock. Slippers and hankies instead of toys and their parents' room and jumping on the bed. Then there magic.

were rituals to be observed. First, the Christmas morning Of course, when Julia came into his life, all the old joys cup of tea (an annual treat this; probably the only time the returned. He found himself

staying up late on Christmas kids made their parents one). They would stand on the Eve, wrapping tiny presents in expensive paper. Buying a freezing kitchen lino in their pyjamas, hopping from foot to huge, fragrant tree as a deliberate antidote to the pallid one foot and willing the old kettle to boil. Pans of vegetables, of yesteryear.

sliced and put in water the night before, already crowded Then he and Julia would stroll along the banks of the the cooker.

Thames, hugging each other in affection as lights Tim would peek through the closed doors of the living shimmered on the water.

room where the piles of presents had magically appeared.

Once, they'd made love during the Queen's speech, Even the skinny, tinselly artificial tree, normally a poor giggling and grinning the whole time, ignoring the pine 162

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needles which insinuated themselves into their buttocks.

Medway wrapped the blanket around Mrs Holland. There He'd never quite been able to take Her Majesty seriously were now about fifteen old people grouped around his car.

again.

'It was this awful sickliness,' Jill continued. 'Got worse the Medway glanced in his rearview mirror and caught sight further we went. They got hysterical. Then the driver just let of the monastery for the first time. Grim-looking place, he go of the wheel...'' She looked over at the driver. 'Poor sod.'

thought to himself.

Medway regarded the shivering group before him. 'Well, The car crunched over broken glass and he slammed on you can't stay here. I can drive you down to the village in the brakes as a coach loomed into view. It had swung shifts.'

diagonally across the road, its smashed front end jammed

‘No. I’ve got a better idea. The monastery’s closer. They’re into a dry-stone wall. Clouds of steam billowed from the all in shock. I’m sure the monks will help. You could take engine. Medway’s blood ran cold as he saw the limp body the frailest in the car. I’ll walk the rest. It’s not far.’

of the driver hanging through the shattered windscreen.

‘Right.’

He pulled the car on to the side of the road and jumped

‘Thanks, er…?’

slightly as bewildered figures began to emerge from the

‘Tim Medway.’ He offered his hand. Jill reacted.

steam. They were old, staggering from the shelter of the bus

‘From the BBC?’

like desperate ghouls.

He nodded. ‘You’re not…?’

He was relieved to see a young woman running towards

‘Jill Mason. It’s my Mr Trevithick you’ve come to see.’

him. She was attractive but in some distress, locks of her

‘Is he…?’

lacquered hair falling into her eyes.

Jill shook her head. ‘No. Stubborn old goat refuses to go

‘Thank God,’ Jill Mason gushed, putting a protective arm anywhere for Christmas. Probably very wise in the around Mrs Holland who was wailing softly in a fractured circumstances.’

voice.

Medway helped four old people into his car. ‘Are you

‘It’s awful. Awful,’ intoned Mr Messingham, his thick sure you can manage?’

round glasses hanging off his nose.

Jill nodded. Medway got into the driving seat. Mrs Jill managed to steer her charges away from the sight of Holland sobbed quietly in the back.

the dead driver.

‘Can I call the police from the monastery?’ Medway asked

‘What happened?’ said Medway, opening the boot of his through the window.

car and producing a blanket.

‘I doubt it. All the phones are out of order.’ Jill stopped as Jill shook her head. ‘We were heading for York. They’re if struck by a thought. ‘Mr Medway?’

all going home for Christmas. Were going home.’ She

‘Yes?’

sighed. ‘Some of them said they felt queasy. I thought it

‘Did you feel anything? When you were coming here?’

must be travel sickness but then I felt it too. And the driver.’

Medway shook his head. ‘No. Nothing.’

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Jill waved him off and the car moved slowly on to the What was left now? He was as old and hollow as the rough track to the monastery which branched off the main monastery itself, running a cottage industry that saved road.

money, not souls.

She gave one last look at the dead driver and then set off He glanced

through the latticed study window and saw in the same direction, herding the old people before her like the Doctor and Ace heading towards the entrance. His heart wayward sheep.

leapt. If anyone could help him with his crisis of faith it was the Doctor. He seemed so wise, so much older than he Abbot Winstanley was glad the morning had come. He appeared. Like a man standing on the bank of time, had lain awake half the night anticipating the return of that unconcerned by the furious flow of the years.

mournful wail, eventually succumbing to sleep in the early A few moments later, Ace and the Doctor were shown in.

hours.

'How do you do,' said Winstanley warmly as the Doctor Now, despite his exhaustion, he was up and about. He introduced Ace. 'Your friend and I have been having some had already observed the usual patterns of prayer, spoken very interesting chats.'

at length to Brother Alec about letting that awful old tramp

'I bet,' said Ace, glancing round the room at the into the monastery again and outlined his plans for the bookshelves. 'Quite a library you've got here, vicar.'

Christmas Day menu to old Minnie the cook.

'Er. Abbot. Yes, yes, it's a bit of a hobby of mine.'

He was supposed to be finding a relevant biblical passage The Doctor spread his hands on the desk before him. 'I to read for his fellow monks but instead was sitting in his won't beat about the bush, Abbot. There are some very study, staring at the previous night's fire.

curious things happening here. I'd like to see some more of Terrible doubts gnawed away at his mind. How long had your history books, if I may?'

he been in this wretched place? Twenty years? From novice Winstanley clapped his hands together delightedly. 'Of monk to Abbot. Twenty years of kneeling and praying and course, of course.'

abstaining in the service of his faith. He laughed a little to He pulled out an elegant mahogany stepladder from a himself. Faith in what? An increasingly godless generation niche in the wall and bustled up to the

top shelf. ‘Particular locked on a course of self-destruction? A youth culture period?’

which worshipped sexual ambiguity and promiscuity? Or

‘Any,’ said the Doctor airily. ‘As far back as you can go.’

was it faith in the God who had created them all?

Within minutes, Winstanley was handing down volume Well, that was the problem, he thought to himself. He after volume - pamphlets, guide books and hefty histories.

didn’t really have faith at all. Not any more. He wanted to.

‘Ace. Get looking,’ the Doctor instructed, throwing half a Oh, how he wanted to. Faith like the burning sense of right dozen books over the desk.

and fulfilment he had once possessed, the faith which had

‘What for?’

sustained him through a turbulent youth.

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‘Anything unusual.’ The Doctor’s head disappeared into a The Doctor looked at her steadily. Ace nodded. She knew pile of papers.

where.

Ace signed. This wasn’t her idea of a fun morning. Sorting through historical junk was too like a school lesson. She’d seen history, real history, past and future; and academic substitutes were bound to pale beside that.

She glanced at her watch. 11:30. Still a good hour and a half before Robin would get there.

Ace let his image swim into her mind as she carelessly leafed through

the documents on her knee. She saw him on his bike, just as he had been when she'd first seen him. That smile had said everything...

'If you're not going to concentrate then you're no use to me.'

Ace looked up, stung. The Doctor was regarding her with inky eyes.

'Sorry.' She looked down at the papers and books, dense with old print. One book, far more modern than the rest, caught her eye at once.

'Doctor?'

He raised his eyes from the book in his hands.

'Is this any good?' she said.

The Doctor moved around the side of the desk and peered over her shoulder.

'What is it?' called Winstanley, still perched up his ladder.

The Doctor took the slim volume from Ace's hands and scanned a few pages. 'It's an archaeological work. It seems there was an expedition here in 1919. A dig. They found remnants of Palaeolithic quarrying.' He cast his eyes over the dust jacket. 'Seems it was abandoned. Under mysterious circumstances.'

'Where was this, then?' said Ace.

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Funny how such a big thing could go unnoticed. In fact, the whole village was terribly quiet. More like a wet Sunday in March than Christmas Eve. Already missing York's wonderful festive air, he made a mental note to spend some Chapter Seven

more time in York before returning to London.

Medway pushed his hands into his pockets, overcoat tails bunching behind him, and mounted the steps to the police station.

‘Have you seen this man?’ announced a poster by the entrance. Medway hadn’t. He pushed open the door and was taken aback by the scene which met his eyes.

In contrast to the quiet of the village, the police station Medway left the car in a side road adjoining the main was in turmoil. The front desk was piled with papers.

street and walked towards the police station. He didn’t Uniformed men scurried to and fro. One man, at the back, a notice the disturbed bushes growing by the pavement, nor look of hopeless resignation on his face, was constantly the other faint traces of Trevithick’s encounter the previous dialling and redialling a heavy black telephone.

night. But he felt distinctly uneasy.

‘Excuse me…’ announced Medway.

There was a chilling wind blowing off the moor, stirring The bustle continued. Medway rang the desk bell.

bare branches and discarded newspapers. Telephone wires George Lowcock appeared from his office, jamming his swung like slack skipping ropes against the white sky, hat on to his head. A smaller, rosy-cheeked man scurried sighing as the wind blew over them.

behind him.

Jangling his keys in his pocket, Medway began to whistle

‘Just try, Albert, that’s all I ask. We’ve got to find a way

‘We Three Kings’ without much enthusiasm, glancing about out somehow.’

nervously at the clusters of nineteenth-century cottages

‘Excuse me,’ said Medway again. Lowcock looked at him which dotted the road.

briefly and then made for the door.

The local pub seemed a more enticing prospect and he

‘Yes, sir?’ sighed Albert wearily.

could have done with a little something after his

‘I’ve come to report an accident. A coach... on the road out experiences that morning. Ferrying hysterical geriatrics was of the village.’

not his thing at all and his supply of small talk had run very Lowcock turned in the doorway. ‘Coach?’

low indeed. Still, the monks had been kindness itself, saying

‘Yes. A party of old folks and a Miss Mason.’

all the right soothing things in that pleasant, bland Lowcock approached him. ‘Any hurt?’

monotone beloved of men of the cloth.

‘The driver. Dead, I’m afraid.’

Now he had to do his bit and report the accident.

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Albert licked a pencil and pulled out a note pad. ‘And you He took Medway by the arm and led him outside. Albert are?’

leaned over the desk towards one of the young constables.

Medway puffed out his cheeks. ‘My name’s Tim Medway.

‘Peter, get over to the York road, will you? Report of an I’m a BBC reporter. I’m here to interview Mr Edmund accident.’

Trevithick...’

The Doctor rubbed his fingers across weary eyes. The Lowcock raised an eyebrow. ‘Are you now? Well, laddie, print on the books before him was beginning to swim and you stick with me and I’ll take you to him. Mind you, after centuries of reading in diverse libraries across the galaxies what we’ve all been through I doubt he’ll be in any state...’

told him it was time to call a halt. He slammed shut the Medway frowned. ‘What d’you mean?’

massive tome before him.

‘Never mind now. This coach...?’

‘I think we’ve found out as much as we can from here,’ he Medway leaned against the desk and shrugged. ‘They said, glancing over at Ace. She looked at her watch. Just were heading for York. Miss Mason said they were after midday and still a while until Robin would arrive. She overcome by some sort of sickness and the driver lost smiled at her companion.

control.’

‘Look, Doctor. I’m sorry if I haven’t been much help so far.

‘Sickness,’ said Lowcock thoughtfully.

What with everything we talked about before...’

‘Think it’s the same thing, George?’ said Albert, pushing The Doctor cast his eyes downwards. Ace continued, ‘I the pencil behind his ear.

had a pretty rough day yesterday. Finding that stiff...’

Lowcock pouted his lower lip. ‘Could be, could be.’ He

‘I know,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m sorry.’

looked Albert in the eye. ‘Do you remember that pollution

‘I just want you to know that even if I’m not with you, I scare a few years back?’

am... in spirit.’

‘Oh aye,’ said Albert brightly.

The Doctor gazed at her sadly. ‘I understand. Thank you.’

Medway was getting interested, his journalistic nose How many times had he been here before? With Victoria sensing a story. ‘Pollution?’

on the gas platform. Jo in Llanfairfach. Tegan in London.

‘Oh, nowt much,’ said Lowcock dismissively. ‘There was She’d grown up before his eyes; this funny misfit, a fire at a chemical plant a few miles off. I was just changing from a little bundle of venom with more chips wondering whether it could be something like that.’

than a Monte Carlo casino into a confident, maturing adult.

‘That doesn’t explain Mrs Yeadon, George. And what It had been a struggle though. He had hated the lies and the about Jack Prudhoe and Dr Shearsmith?’

half-truths he’d felt compelled to create in order to protect

‘Mmm. You’re right. “It is fatal to theorise without facts”, her from the future. After Fenric and more recently their eh Watson?’

adventures battling the Timewyrm, he’d hoped to have put Lowcock turned to Medway. ‘Come along then, I’ll all that behind them. But now there were other introduce you to Professor Nightshade.’

considerations...

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Ace jumped as the walkie-talkie in the Doctor’s pocket The Doctor approached Jill. ‘Hello again. What happened squawked into life. He produced it with some relief.

here?’

‘Doctor?’ It was Cooper’s voice, distorted by static.

Jill sighed, pushing the annoying curl of hair from her

‘Yes, Dr Cooper? Over.’

eyes. ‘We had an accident out on the moor. All very

‘Bloody hell. It works! Erm... We’re monitoring a slow peculiar.’

build-up. I’d like you here. Over.’

The Doctor mumbled something sympathetic and then

‘On my way. Over and out.’

reeled as a small shambling figure almost knocked him off He stuffed the black box into his coat and picked up a pile his feet. Billy Coote glanced at him for a moment, biscuit-of selected books which he’d tied together with string.

brown teeth protruding aggressively, then shuffled towards

‘Coming?’

the twisting stone steps which led to the tower.

Ace shuffled uncomfortably. ‘I thought I might hang Jill explained what had happened, proffering a mug of around here for a bit. If that’s OK with you?’

strong tea which the Doctor declined.

The Doctor nodded a little stiffly. ‘Whatever,’ he said and

‘Did you all feel this?’

left the room.

‘Yes. But Mr Medway, the one who helped us, must’ve Ace sat down in the Abbot’s chair and chewed her lip.

been driving in the same conditions as us and he didn’t feel There was a funny sensation churning in her stomach, a a thing. I thought it might be something in the air...’

kind of nervous anticipation mingled with sadness, like the

‘Gas?’

first and last days of school combined.

‘Something like that. But what Mr Medway says rather The Doctor left the Abbot’s study and traversed the rules that out.’

narrow corridor which led to the open cloisters. He paused

‘I’m not so sure,’ said the Doctor darkly. ‘He was coming a moment, gazing at the hard white sky which was once into the village.’

more threatening snow, then he turned the corner towards

‘What d’you mean by that?’

the Great Hall.

‘Where’s Abbot Winstanley?’

He found the room buzzing with noise and confusion. A Jill looked around at the chaos in the room. ‘He was here.

dozen or so monks were helping the coach party into hastily Can’t see him now.’

improvised beds, nursing sprains and applying poultices.

The Doctor turned towards the door. ‘Never mind. Just Jill Mason stood to one side, banging the last dregs from an tell him I’ve gone back to the telescope, would you?’

ancient tea urn. Mrs Holland was still moaning softly to He gave her a little smile and left the room through the herself in the corner.

big double doors.

‘It’s these blackie postmen,’ announced Mr Peel to no one Jill carried two mugs of steaming tea over to Mrs Holland.

in particular.

She sat down and sipped one herself, letting the old woman cradle hers like a security blanket. ‘All right now, Esmé?’

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Mrs Holland looked at her blankly, her toothless mouth her zest he liked, her spontaneity and sparkle. That and her champing in agitation.

rather appealing face. He smiled. Maybe she could come to

‘Wilfrid?’ she called weakly. ‘Oh, it’s you. I was just Italy with him. Maybe they could go away sooner...

recalling...’

Slow down. Slow down. You hardly know her yet.

She looked down and frowned. ‘It’s all changed now, you He thought of Ace’s words: ‘Plenty of time, sunshine’ and see. All changed. I used to have such lovely long hair. My beamed.

mother used to sit and brush it by the fire. Like spun gold Still beaming, he walked through the door of The she always said.’

Shepherd’s Cross. Trevithick looked up from a table where Mrs Holland put the mug on to the arm of her chair and Lawrence sat, head in hands.

held out her hands before her. The skin was tight and

‘Robin! Oh, thank God!’ cried Lawrence, springing to his wrinkled like a chicken’s, large liver spots speckling every feet and scooping up the boy in his arms.

finger. She turned to look at Jill, her eyes full of regret and

‘What’s wrong, Dad?’

what could only be bitterness.

‘Thank God. Thank God,’ Lawrence muttered, burying his face in Robin’s coat.

Robin enjoyed the walk into the village, despite the cold.

‘Where’s Betty?’

This wasn’t his favourite time of year by any means. He was Lawrence drew back a little and Robin saw the puffy a summer boy, content to potter around in his T-shirt and redness of his eyes for the first time.

shorts during the dog days of July and August, playing

‘What happened up there? Did it get you too?’ Lawrence football with the lads from work well into the balmy night.

said in a gabbled shriek.

Sometimes he would put in a few hours behind the bar at

‘What?’

the pub and this, in addition to his wage from the

‘How come you’re all right and she’s…’

newspaper office in York, usually meant he could save Robin took him by the shoulders and shook him. ‘Where’s enough for a holiday. By the summer of 1969 he hoped to Mum?’ He looked Lawrence straight in the eyes. ‘She was have enough to get to Italy. Or maybe Brazil for the World sleeping when I left her.’

Cup the year after.

Lawrence’s face fell. ‘You left her?’

But now things had taken an unexpected turn. This girl, Robin licked his dry lips. ‘I had to go. The Doctor…’

Ace, whom he’d only known a day or so, had totally floored

‘You left her? How could you do that? How could you?’

him. And, wonderfully, she seemed to feel the same way too.

Robin shook him desperately. ‘What’s wrong? Where is It was early days, of course, and he wasn’t getting his hopes she?’

up, but maybe he was on to something good here.

Lawrence turned on him. ‘She’s dead, you selfish little She had balls. Not real ones, of course (though he bastard!’

suspected a few of his previous girlfriends had). No, it was

‘What?’ Robin’s voice was leaden.

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‘I left you in charge. I thought I could trust you!’

Trevithick shrugged helplessly. ‘Listen, George, we have

‘I’ve got to see her...’

to talk...’

Trevithick laid a hand on the boy’s shoulder. ‘No, son. It’ll

‘Hang on a minute, Edmund.’ Lowcock turned to do no good. You’ll only upset yourself.’ Robin shrugged Medway who was hovering by the door. ‘Edmund him off angrily. ‘Get off me!’

Trevithick, this is Mr Medway of the BBC. Come to see you.’

Lawrence grabbed Robin by the shoulder, spun him Trevithick frowned, as though annoyed that something so round and cracked him across the face. A ribbon of blood trivial should get in his way now. ‘Hmm? Oh, yes, yes.

trickled from his nose. He looked at Lawrence and then Pleased to meet you.’

down at the floor.

Medway sat down, smiling in a baffled sort of way.

‘How could you?’ hissed Lawrence. ‘How could you?’

‘Listen, George,’ continued Trevithick. ‘Robin says that he Robin marched towards the stairs.

and that Doctor fellow found Jack Prudhoe’s body out on Trevithick sat Lawrence down and pushed the inevitable the moor.’

glass of whiskey into his hand. He could hear Robin’s

‘Good Lord.’

footsteps above. There was a long, pregnant silence Trevithick moved closer to the policeman and whispered.

followed by a dreadful, hollow moan. Moments later, Robin

‘Died the same way as Betty, it seems.’

clattered unsteadily down the stairs.

Lowcock sat down heavily. ‘Whatever next?’ He took off

‘Hardly anything left of her,’ he croaked, running his his hat and laid it on the table before him. ‘There have been…

hand over his face.

further developments, Edmund. Your Miss Mason and her Trevithick nodded sadly. ‘We don’t know what happened, coach party have had an accident.’

son, but the police are doing everything they can.’

Trevithick gasped, his lopsided mouth falling open.

Robin looked dazedly at the old man. ‘I’ve seen it before.’

‘It’s all right. They’re all fine except the driver, poor devil.

‘What?’

Isn’t that right, Mr Medway?’

‘I’ve seen it before. Out on the moor. Me and the Doctor.

‘Yes. They’re all up at the monastery.’

We found Jack Prudhoe. He’s dead. Same… same thing.’

Lowcock puffed out his cheeks. ‘It seems they experienced Trevithick felt suddenly scared.

the same symptoms as you and I yesterday, Lol.’

Lawrence looked at Robin. ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean…’

Lawrence turned his head and raised raw, exhausted eyes.

Robin looked blank. ‘I’ve got to go,’ he stammered and

‘Sickness. Nausea,’ continued Lowcock. ‘Driver lost ran from the room.

control.’

Lowcock and Medway stepped back as the pub door

‘ “Like we couldn’t get out of the village” ,’ said burst open and Robin dashed past them towards the moor Trevithick quietly.

path. Grimacing, Lowcock stepped inside.

Lowcock started. ‘Eh?’

‘Everything all right?’ he said quietly.

‘Isn’t that what you said this morning? About last night?’

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Lowcock sat back, frowning, and then roused himself.

through. Hawthorne was absent, something for which Vijay

‘Anyway, this won’t get the washing done!’ he said cheerily.

was hugely grateful.

‘Lol, I want you to come with me to Mrs Bass’s B and B. No The double doors opened and the Doctor strode into the sense you staying here and upsetting yourself.’

room. He nodded to each of them and put down his pile of Lawrence nodded dumbly and allowed himself to be led books on a bench.

from his chair to the door. Lowcock turned to Medway and

‘Ah, good,’ cried Cooper, joining him.

Trevithick. ‘I’ll leave you two to get acquainted.’ He tipped

‘Steady signals,’ said the Doctor, casting a glance at the his hat and helped Lawrence outside to the car.

console screens.

Medway looked at Trevithick rather uncomfortably. ‘I...

‘Yes, but not from the nova. Something else.’

er ... I seem to have come at a rather bad time.’

‘A build-up of some kind. As if it were gaining strength.’

Trevithick chuckled. ‘You can say that again.’

‘As if what were gaining strength?’ said Vijay, looking up.

‘Of course, I won’t detain you any further. We’ll arrange

‘That’s what we have to find out.’

to meet some time in the New Year.’

He sat down in a swivel chair and cleared his throat. ‘I Trevithick stood up and pushed the whiskey bottle think it’s time we examined a few facts.’

towards the newcomer. ‘Nonsense,’ he cried, pulling two Holly rose from her chair and sat next to Vijay, allowing glasses from the bar. ‘I won’t hear of it.’

his arm to snake around her shoulders.

Medway looked at the bottle gingerly. The old boy was

‘Go on,’ said Cooper, folding her arms.

probably half cut already. ‘Well, I’ll help if I can.’

‘Firstly, this station is not the only thing to occupy this site.

‘That’s it exactly,’ said Trevithick, a little unsteadily. He There was quarry work here, thousands of years ago, and a felt in his pocket for the old army service revolver which he twelfth-century castle too. The castle was unoccupied for had retrieved from his room. He was rather glad, now, that most of its life because it was reputed to be haunted.’

he had bothered to keep it in good condition. That creature

‘Oh come on, Doctor. We have enough problems in the wouldn’t catch him napping again.

material world ...’ began Cooper.

‘First of all,’ he said to Medway, ‘you can sit there and The Doctor held up his hands. ‘Bear with me, bear with listen. I want to tell you what’s been going on...’

me. During the English Civil Wars, the castle was occupied Vijay was having trouble concentrating. Every few by a small troop of Cavaliers who saw something that minutes he would cast an anxious glance across the control terrified them. Afterwards, the castle was destroyed by fire.

room to where Holly was sitting, seemingly absorbed in her

'In 1919, an archaeological expedition was launched, work. Vijay suspected that she was just functioning ostensibly to dig up the ancient quarry. But it was automatically in order to blot out her recent experiences.

abandoned after several prominent members disappeared.'

Cooper was running around the room like a thing Cooper harrumphed. 'I still don't see what you're getting possessed, ruffling her hair perplexedly as fresh data came at.'

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'I would've dismissed this stuff as superstition just as

'Well, what is he trying to suggest? That we're being readily as you were it not for some striking parallels. Two plagued by demons?'

people have died, that much we know. A third, Dr

'Look, Tom, we've all been under a lot of stress...'

Shearsmith, is missing. Mrs Yeadon at The Shepherd's Cross Hawthorne stalked across the room, eyes blazing. 'No!

has been confined to bed after claiming to see her brother's I'm sorry, Dr Cooper, but I think I've been quiet too long.

ghost. Miss Kidd's experience we all know about.'

We let this - this person and his freakish friend waltz in here Cooper turned to Holly kindly. 'Holly's been working without so much as a by-your-leave! Within five minutes very hard...'

he's telling us what to do...'

'I know what I saw!'

'Story of my life,' said the Doctor.

'So do I,' said Vijay.

'And now,' roared Hawthorne, 'now you're sitting here Cooper bit her lip and changed tack. 'You said parallels?'

listening to him tell ghost stories!'

The Doctor pulled at the string tying together his books. 'I

'Dr Hawthorne...' put in Vijay.

didn't notice it at first. Ace found it.' He scanned the closing

'And as for you,' Hawthorne stepped back disgustedly, pages of the book which Ace had given him and gave a little

'I'm going to make sure you're off this project by the New cry of satisfaction.

Year. I don't intend to have my work jeopardised by an

' "Further investigation into the disappearances",' he read hysterical girl and a stupid bloody n-----!'

aloud, ' "was hampered by a breakdown in the telephone Vijay shot to his feet and caught Hawthorne by the lapels systems and a mysterious outbreak of sickness which of his lab coat. For several seconds they glared at each other.

afflicted any who strayed on to the moor. Although later Then Vijay let go, a protracted, angry hiss escaping his attributed to a form of water poisoning, no concrete nostrils.

information has ever become available".'

'I believe I'm a Paki to you, Dr Hawthorne. You might at He clapped the book shut and gazed at his little audience.

least get your terminology right.'

'I need hardly remind you of our communication difficulties.

Hawthorne glared at them all in contempt, turned on his And, this morning, a coach party from the old people's heel and disappeared into the interior.

home was unable to leave the village after the driver

'Tom!' called Cooper. 'Tom, for God's sake!'

crashed the vehicle. They all complained of a terrible She threw up her hands helplessly. 'I'm ... so sorry, Vijay.'

sickness.'

Vijay shrugged. Holly forgot her own troubles for a There was a slow handclap from the far wall. They all moment and kissed him fondly.

turned to see Hawthorne, a sour smile on his face. 'Very The Doctor looked down, a little embarrassed. 'Well, good, Doctor. Keep this up and you'll have them believing whatever Dr Hawthorne's opinion, I urge you to take this in Santa Claus.'

seriously. I can't explain what's happening but we must all

'All right, Tom,' said Cooper quietly.

be on our guard.'

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'Hang on!' said Cooper suddenly, her eyes darting to the It was like the sixties, she thought. Everyone was always consoles. 'It's starting again!'

going on about how brilliant they were. Admittedly, she The afternoon was wearing on and there was still no sign wasn't exactly in the best place to observe things. Crook of Robin. Ace had wandered around the monastery, trying Marsham wasn't Carnaby Street. But things probably to interest herself in the tapestries and carvings. She found a weren't so different to her own time. People were a bit small, wizened gargoyle which reminded her a bit of the happier. There was more sex all of a sudden. Things were Doctor and laughed. But then

she recalled their colourful and fun after the drabness and austerity of conversation in Mrs Crithin's cafe.

wartime. But it was more than likely that the decade was Retirement! He really seemed serious. And where did that fondly remembered because everyone was so much more leave her? She needed to convince him that he really had optimistic about the future. A summer of love that would go been doing good all these years, that the Universe needed on forever. It they'd known what was coming, just how him.

much fun would the sixties have been?

Ace sat down on the sill of a glassless window which Ace had risen from her seat and looked up at the already looked out on to the cloisters. She had thought that their darkening sky. She turned and caught sight of the cheerful terrifying experiences inside the Doctor's own mind during glow coming from the windows of the Great Hall. Strolling the final battle with the Timewyrm had exorcised the up to the big wooden door, she heaved it open and stepped Doctor's angst. Obviously she had been too optimistic.

inside.

Although, she thought carefully, it didn't seem to be guilt The room was a forest of candles. They protruded from over any past actions which was haunting the Doctor. His every available surface: long, stout church specimens in malaise seemed to run very deep, seemed to be a profound waxy puddles spreading a cheerful and cosy yellow light dissatisfaction and loneliness, a yearning to belong.

around the place. A blazing fire crackled in the hearth.

Ace thought of her Auntie Rose, always bemoaning the Jill Mason was walking between the chairs like a youth of today and saying how much nicer everything used miniskirted Florence Nightingale. Most of her charges had to be. That was what was wrong with the Doctor. He was dropped off to sleep although the Rayner sisters and Mr trapped in the past. Remembering happier times which Peel were mumbling quietly to themselves.

probably weren't that much different to today.

Three or four of the monks had lingered too, leaning She looked about at the crumbling stones.

against the walls or staring into the fire.

How many lives had this place seen come and go? How Ace felt a little thrill of pleasure run through her. It would many people who thought themselves so important?

be good to be here with Robin, somewhere so festive and Ace smiled to herself. And how many young women had cosy. She walked towards Jill, her shoes making a satisfying sat here thinking exactly the same thing?

clop on the stone-flagged floor.

‘Everything OK?’

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Jill turned round. ‘Er, yes. Do I...?’

Jill and Ace began to join in as best they could. Mrs

‘Ace.’ She extended a hand. ‘I’m a friend of the Doctor’s.’

Holland looked around at her friends. Their expressions Jill smiled. ‘Of course.’

were strangely melancholy, betraying the wealth of emotion Mrs Holland jerked into wakefulness, blinking about stirred up by the old song. Mr Peel rubbed a hand across his herself in confusion. Jill laid a soothing hand on her brow.

eyes. He seemed to be crying.

‘It’s all right, Esmé.’

‘What’s the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile,

‘Wilfrid? Is that you?’ The old woman grasped Jill’s hand so...!’

and touched it to her wrinkled cheek.

Ace began to gravitate away from the group, feeling a

‘It’s Jill, Esmé.’

little uncomfortable. She’d always hated singsongs, right

‘Jill? Oh.’ Mrs Holland frowned. ‘Oh, yes. Of course. I was from school assemblies to New Year revelling. They just thinking.. .Wilfrid. He’s gone now, you know.’

smacked of people trying too hard to enjoy themselves.

Jill stroked Mrs Holland’s hair affectionately. ‘I know.’

‘Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile,

‘Nineteen-fifteen. I can remember the day. He was first in smile, smile!’

the queue at the recruiting office, you know. Oh yes. He Ace stepped through the door of the Great Hall and found used to parade up and down in front of that mirror with his herself once again in the chilly cloisters. Evening had drawn big boots on and all his buttons shining. “I’ll be back for about the monastery now. Where was Robin?

Christmas,” he said. But he wasn’t. I knew there was something wrong but... but you were supposed to get a Mr Dutton raised his hand, a wicked smile cracking his telegram. There was a bit of a mix-up. All I got was a face as he launched into a discordant rendition of ‘We’re brown-paper parcel. His uniform. His boots. And his little Gonna Hang Out the Washing on the Siegfried Line’. Jill pocket book.’

looked on benevolently. This was just the thing to get their She turned tear-misted eyes to Jill. ‘There was a bayonet spirits up.

hole through it. The pages were all stuck together, all ... stiff Later, she would reflect on the irony of that phrase.

with blood. I remember. I just stood on the step and cried.’

She looked across at Mrs Holland and her smile froze. The Mr Messingham shifted in his chair and cleared his throat.

old woman was sitting bolt upright, transfixed by Then he began to sing in a high, tuneless voice.

something she had spotted in the corner.

‘Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag…’

‘Esmé?’ called Jill.

‘And smile, smile…’ joined in Mr Dutton.

Mrs Holland peered into the candle-lit gloom, her mouth

‘Smile...’ finished Mrs Holland.

champing in agitation. Jill looked again. There was a man

‘While you’ve a lucifer to light your fag...’

standing in the shadows by the fireplace. Even in the poor

‘Smile boys, that’s the style,’ croaked Mr Bollard, grinning.

light, she could make out his khaki uniform and boots. He began to move swiftly across the room.

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‘Wilfrid!’ Mrs Holland yelled, her voice trembling.

Then Mrs Holland cried out, her voice choking as A little girl ran across the room and sat on Mr Peel’s knee.

ectoplasmic fluid erupted from her throat. Before her, She was wearing a long, Edwardian dress and carried an Wilfrid’s face began to fall away, flesh dripping from the old spinning top.

awful darkness beneath. His bony arms seared into her

‘Come on, Reuben,’ she trilled. ‘Come and play!’

sides and she vanished into a ball of light.

Mr Peel gawped at her and thrust her from his knee, a The monks who had remained were running for the doors.

look of horrified revulsion on his face. ‘No! No, not you!’

Mr Peel’s sister was creeping remorselessly towards him, Jill looked about desperately. From every corner, dark smiling a chilling smile. The room began to blaze with white figures were emerging, like bas-reliefs coming to life. Light light.

trailed from their eyes and hands.

Jill panicked suddenly, her whole body trembling. She ran

'Stella?' said Mr Peel in a disbelieving whisper as the little to the door and threw herself out into the cloisters, girl looked into his eyes. Jill knew about Stella. A little girl slamming the door behind her.

of eight or nine. Mr Peel's sister. She'd died after eating Ace, who was standing some way off, was by her side in a poisonous berries sometime during the First World War.

moment.

Died.

'What is it?'

The uniformed man blazed through the room towards Jill gestured towards the door. Ace peered through the Mrs Holland. Someone started screaming hysterically.

dusty window and gasped. All she could see were people

'Esmé,' said Wilfrid, his voice rustling like tissue paper. 'My bathed in light, roaring like columns of fire. She turned darling.'

around, brimming with questions. Jill was gone.

The old woman's jaw fell open. The figure stopped by her Ace turned back to the window, her eyes widening in chair and opened its arms to embrace her.

shock. Then she saw something which froze her blood. The Jill looked crazily about her. The old people were main doors had opened and Robin had stepped into the stumbling about in blind panic as shapes split off from the room. He was knocked off his feet in an instant as a wave of shadows and moved towards them. There was a thin light tore through the place, crashing shut the doors, which woman in a black dress bearing down on Mr Messingham buckled and expanded. Ace ran inside.

and a tiny baby crawling towards Mr Bollard. The old man's

'Robin!'

hoarse scream filled the air. Mrs Holland rose from her chair, The boy was standing stock still, staring at the terrible her bent back straightening determinedly as she stepped beauty of the apparitions

before him.

into her husband's arms. He smiled, and her face suffused Ace dived for his legs and brought him down. He seemed with joy. Fountains of radiant light shot between their to snap out of his trance and hugged her to him. 'Come on!

hands, cocooning them in a web of energy.

Come on!' Ace cried, dragging him to his feet. She looked 188

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around the room. Ethereal energy lapped at the walls, rising of buzzing energy retracting a little. The Abbot stopped towards the ceiling like liquid fire.

praying.

Robin spotted the stairway to the tower and pointed.

Medway wondered whether he had a lunatic in the car.

'There!'

He'd listened with patience to Trevithick's story and They ducked and weaved through the columns of light.

accepted the reality of the missing persons and the Like running through a forest fire, thought Ace, grabbing landlady's death. Now the old man had insisted they drive Robin's hand as he stumbled.

to the radio telescope to find someone called 'the Doctor'.

She pushed him into the well of the staircase and his

'It's not that I don't believe you, sir,' he said, turning the knees connected with the steps. He howled in pain but car on to the moor road once again. 'It's just a little hard to didn't stop, dragging himself upwards. Ace cast an anxious take in.'

look behind. The room was humming with light, spindly

‘I know, I know,’ said Trevithick, biting his finger nails.

fronds crackling their way towards them.

‘But there’s more.’

Ace pushed at Robin’s backside and he clambered up the

‘More?’ Medway raised his eyebrows. The old man steps, using his hands for purchase on the cold stone. They looked out of the car window into the night. The headlights seemed to go around and around endlessly.

lit up dark bushes and indiscernible structures. ‘I told you I After several exhausting minutes, they emerged on to a was attacked and that the... thing which attacked me was narrow landing which led to a long, long corridor. From frightened off by Mr Yeadon’s car.’

behind one of the doors came the sound of prayer.

He nodded slowly. Trevithick took a deep breath. ‘Mr

‘Shh!’ hissed Ace. They listened intently. The voice was Medway. It was a monster. Seven feet tall. Like a great cracked, defeated, mumbling the prayers in a hopeless dirge.

insect.’

‘It’s the Abbot,’ said Ace. Robin looked back the way they Medway opened his mouth but Trevithick pressed on.

had come. The dark walls were already brightening.

‘You came here to see me about Nightshade. Well, I can tell

‘It’s coming after us!’ he cried. Ace grabbed his collar and you for certain that the creature, that real creature, was the they clattered up the next flight of steps.

same thing which I used to fight on television!’

‘I know we shouldn’t keep going up,’ she gasped, her Medway didn’t say anything. Trevithick rubbed his eyes.

lungs bursting. ‘In movies, if people go up buildings you

‘Not a man in a rubber suit. Not this time. A real thing.

know they're going to fall off sooner or later!'

Trying to kill me. That's what I saw under the lamp last

'No choice,' called Robin over his shoulder, feeling dizzy night and that's what smashed my window. They've come as he ran round and round the never-ending spiral.

back to get me!'

Behind them, the tide of light reached the landing,

'Right,' said Medway.

throbbing with power. It paused as though listening, fronds

'Oh, I know you don't believe me. But it's true! I swear it!

Look!'

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He showed Medway the tear in his jacket and waistcoat where the creature's mandible had struck him. Medway Medway and Trevithick opened the control room doors was grateful for the distraction of arrival. The security gate on to a scene of pandemonium. Cooper, Vijay and Holly was wide open, just as the Doctor had left it, and the were running about the place, trying desperately to fathom telescope dish plunged into darkness.

the explosion of data. The Doctor stood alone in the centre

'We're here,' said Medway quietly.

of everything, his eyes dark and fathomless.

'It's so strong!' cried Cooper.

Hawthorne sat on his bed, hugging his knees to his chin.

'Doctor!' Trevithick called above the din.

Bastards.

‘We’ve got to use the safety cutouts!’ Vijay shouted. ‘It’s Who did they think they were?

too big this time!’

Well, he’d soon sort them out. One phone call to Cooper nodded. ‘See what you can do.’

Cambridge and he’d have the pair of them off the project.

Holly threw herself into a chair and began to hammer He sighed. That was if the bloody phones ever started figures into a console. She frowned. ‘It’s no good. I can’t working again.

stop it!’

Anyway, his superiors were bound to recognise the truth

‘Doctor!’ Trevithick advanced across the room and shook of his statements. It was all well and good paying lip service the Doctor’s arm. ‘I have things to tell you.’ Medway to these fashionable ideas on racial harmony but it jumped as a hideous wail began to assail his ears.

obviously didn’t work in practice. He could show them that.

‘Klaxon?’ said Cooper.

Vijay Degun had admitted to taking illegal substances, had

‘Fence breached again.’ Holly looked up from her work.

risked the entire project!

The Doctor glanced at Trevithick. ‘Not now, not now.’ He Hawthorne was disappointed in Cooper. He’d expected ran to the window and peered out into the darkness. Light more. Didn’t she realise where it would all lead? Powell was was pouring from the silhouetted monastery.

right. ‘Rivers of blood,’ he’d promised. Rivers of blood.

Cooper pulled on a parka. ‘I’m going to check the fence.

What was he doing skulking in his room? Who were they Won’t be

five minutes.’

to tell him how to behave? They weren’t his teachers. They

‘No!’ cried Holly. ‘It’s not safe.’

weren’t his mother. Hawthorne wished she were here now

‘Be careful,’ said Vijay.

so he could bury his head into the secure, perfumed folds of Cooper threw a glance at the bewildered Trevithick and her dress. Perhaps she would read him a bedtime story. He Medway, and then disappeared through the doors. ‘There’s stiffened. No. Not that. Not… now.

something happening at the monastery!’ cried the Doctor, He could hear the frantic activity in the control room but covering his ears as the klaxon honked deafeningly.

didn’t move from his bed. If they were so clever, they could Then the lights went out.

manage without him. Couldn’t they?

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Hawthorne lay back on his bed, chuckling to himself. He could hear the klaxon wailing now. They had got themselves into a pickle.

Well, crisis or no crisis, he wasn't going to offer any advice. First thing in the morning he would take the Land Rover, drive to York and get the first train out of this rancid county. Then he would deliver his official letter of complaint and...

He turned over and pushed his hands under the pillow then jumped up in shock. There was a pool of sticky black liquid spreading across the sheet.

Surprised, he lifted his coated fingers to his face and sniffed. What was it? Pitch? Bitumen? No, it was... it was...

Tar.

Hawthorne's spine froze. For several long minutes he was Winstanley didn't move. There had been a voice in his quite unable to move. The harsh, unshaded light above his head. No words. Just a voice. A presence. Answering his head flickered, brightened and died.

prayers. He glanced around his cell quickly. A corona of He listened to the sound of his own stertorous breathing light sparkled round the door. With his heart in his mouth, and then swung his legs over the side of the bed.

he put a pudgy hand on the door and slowly opened it. He He would get up. Run to the door. Down the corridor. To yelped in shock at the wall of energy which filled the the control room. Everything would be all right.

corridor like sheet-lightning.

Everything...

It was beautiful. Beautiful...

Strangely, he wasn't at all surprised when the tacky black Backing into the room, he stumbled against a chair and paw grasped his ankle.

fell to his knees.

Yes, that was only right. On your knees, he thought. He had doubted. His faith had been weak but now, oh now, his prayers had been answered. Winstanley prostrated himself before the light. Slowly, scarcely daring to breathe, he opened his eyes.

The energy before him had begun to assume a shape, pixels of delicate light swirling and swirling until a man stood before him, robed arms outstretched. The face was 194

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pale, bearded, ascetic. Light shivered over the shoulder-length hair.

'Oh my Christ!' sobbed Winstanley, reaching out trembling hands. 'Oh, Christ! Christ!'

He stumbled forwards on his knees. The man's face was Chapter Eight

kindly, the brown eyes warm and forgiving. He extended a hand: a long, finely boned hand in which a ragged hole had been torn. Blood oozed from the wound.

Winstanley took the man's hand and pressed it to his face.

'Blessed blood,' he wept. 'Sweet Jesus, forgive me.'

His eyes flicked upwards, catching a tiny change in the man's face. The brows drew together, eyes narrowing. The Trevithick slid to the floor, his eyes darting to and fro as kindly smile creased into a mocking grin.

he willed them to become accustomed to the darkness. He Winstanley felt the stigmatic hand close around his face, could make out only indistinct shapes illuminated by the the bones of his jaw crumbling like powder. Then there was glow of the monastery. Something bobbed into view by him nothing but a searing pain: pain like a billion needles and he gasped, startled. 'Are you all right, sir?' It was ripping through his mind as the apparition surged down his Medway.

throat.

Trevithick nodded and then realised he'd have to vocalise Winstanley's smile, so long forced and unreal, widened his assent.

‘Yes. Yes, thank you.’

impossibly as energy roared into him. Then his broad head Around them, the machinery was once again winding imploded with a vile clatter.

down. Vijay stumbled across the room and found Holly. He

‘You are forgiven,’ chuckled the apparition as it closed pressed his cheek to hers and called, ‘Doctor?’

around the Abbot’s lifeless body.

The Doctor moved to stand by the window, his figure silhouetted against the glow of the monastery like that of a child watching a bonfire.

‘Please excuse me,’ he said quietly. ‘I must return to the monastery. Ace may need me.’

He dashed across the room without knocking over a single stick of furniture.

‘I’ll be back,’ he called over his shoulder. ‘Try and stay together. Things are getting serious.’ The double doors clattered and he was gone.

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Holly jumped as Medway flicked the flint of his lighter, Vijay tripped over Holly. ‘Wait!’ he called. She grasped his face looming into view close by. ‘I suggest we find some his hand. ‘What is it?’

illumination,’ he said, standing up.

The double doors opened again and Medway ran through

‘There are some candles in my room,’ said Vijay.

into the night.

‘No,’ said Holly quickly. ‘I don’t want you to go back

‘We found Hawthorne. In his room,’ whispered Vijay.

there.’

‘Dead?’ said Trevithick.

‘It’s all right. I’ll be careful.’ He laid a hand on her arm.

‘Yes. All rotten. Decayed.’

‘Listen out for Cooper, I don’t like the thought of her on her Trevithick sighed. ‘Just like Mrs Yeadon.’

own out there.’

Vijay looked at the old man’s candle-lit features. ‘Mrs Medway swore as the flame scorched his thumb. ‘I’ll Yeadon too? God help us…’

come with you.’

They could hear Medway’s car stuttering into life and

‘What about Hawthorne?’ cried Holly. ‘I’d forgotten all reversing out of the compound.

about him.’

‘Well, that’s my interview gone for a burton,’ said

‘He can do what he likes just as long as he stays out of my Trevithick.

way.’ Vijay’s voice was strained and angry. Medway flicked the lighter again and they set off into the interior.

Medway spun the wheel, prickles of sweat shimmering Trevithick stumbled towards Holly. ‘Hello, my dear. I’m over his back and shoulders. He was breathing hard, panic Edmund.’

coursing through him.

‘Holly. Hi.’ She looked about in the darkness, evidently They had pushed open the door of Hawthorne’s room on unnerved.

their way back from getting the candles. He was lying on

‘Reminds me of the War,’ said Trevithick, struggling to the bed with

his back to them and the Asian bloke had make conversation. Holly smiled and nodded.

shaken his shoulder to wake him. But Hawthorne wasn't

'Perhaps,' began Trevithick, 'perhaps you'd like to fill me asleep. He was withered and dry like an unwrapped in on what's been going on here?'

mummy. And the strench...

Holly shrugged. 'I don't know. Strange things. It's like a Medway shivered, did a three-point turn and careered on dream ...'' There was a shriek from somewhere in the to the moor road. He was getting out.

corridor. Holly stiffened. 'Vijay?' she shouted.

The tower was dark and silent. For some time, Ace had Trevithick backed against the console as running footsteps been aware of a deep, resonant throbbing sound from the echoed around the room.

monastery below but now that, and the accompanying light,

'Wait!' It was Vijay's voice. Holly sighed with relief. Two seemed to have subsided.

candle flames bobbed across the room like will o' the wisp.

They had staggered up the final flight of spiral stairs and Dark figures flashed by. Trevithick frowned in confusion.

emerged through a trap door into a long, empty room, its 198

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corners sheathed in dusty shadow. A solitary window was

'You said "You should see him now". What did you blank and open on to the night outside.

mean?' He smiled, no malice intended.

In a voice cracked by emotion Robin had told Ace about

‘I’m not from round here,’ was all she managed to say.

his stepmother. She’d pulled him close to her, letting hot,

‘I gathered that much. Who is the Doctor anyway? Your salty tears flood over her shoulder. Unable to think of the dad?’

adequate words, she had simply kissed him, feeling him She laughed, a funny, snuffly laugh. ‘Oh, that’s a good relax into her arms. Desire swept over her and she ran her one. He’s worse than a dad sometimes. But mostly he’s just hand through his hair, pressing her lips to his quaking face.

my friend.’

He tasted like sugar.

Robin rested his head on one hand and looked Robin pulled away, adding little kisses to her cheeks and thoughtfully into the corner. ‘Ace, whatever’s going on here, neck, breathing haltingly as his sobs died away.

you seem... you seem to know more about it.’ He shook his

‘Thanks,’ he said.

head hastily. ‘No, I don’t mean that. You just seem to take it Ace smiled and stroked his forehead. ‘No problem.’

all in your stride. Like you’ve seen it before.’

She held him for several blissful minutes.

Ace sighed, wondering whether to make a clean breast of

‘Dorothy?’

things there and then. She thought of something the Doctor She tensed, then laughed. ‘The Doctor told you?’

had said and whispered, with as much gravitas as she could Robin nodded, shifting to lay his head in her lap. He muster, ‘I’ve seen some things in my time.’

gazed up at her face, side-lit by the frosty blue night outside.

‘That’s what the Doctor said.’

‘Hello.’

They both laughed.

She looked down at him and brushed the fringe from his eyes. ‘Hello.’

The Doctor was halfway to the monastery when the There was a gentle bleep from Ace’s watch. She touched illumination faded, the light bleeding from the monastery the mechanism with her finger and silenced it. ‘What’s windows falling back like a retreating tide. There was a that?’ said Robin, his brow creasing.

disquieting silence and then the low moan of the wind Ace shrugged. ‘Some alarm call I forgot about.’

returned.

‘You have an alarm on your watch?’

The looming monastery tower was now indistinguishable

‘Yeah.’

in the dark night.

‘Where did you get it?’

The Doctor stopped and stared at the building, his breath

‘Camden Market.’

shimmering in clouds. Gradually, he became aware of the Robin frowned again. ‘What was it you said earlier on?

sound of running feet slip-slapping across the moor. He When the Stones were on?’

peered into the night and made out Jill Mason, haring across Ace felt a little uneasy. ‘Nothing. I didn’t mean...’

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the blasted landscape with mud belching underfoot. She ran Trevithick sat in a swivel chair, twiddling his thumbs straight into him and the Doctor held her arms firmly.

anxiously. Holly stood by herself at the window, chewing

'Doctor!' she cried. 'Oh God, Doctor. They're all dead!'

her fingernails down to the quick. Vijay realised she would The Doctor's face froze. 'Who? Who's dead?'

need some time to get over the shock of seeing James, or Jill bit her lip, her voice broken into hiccough-like sobs.

whatever it was that had appeared in her room. She was

'My old folks. My responsibility...' she wailed.

shuddering involuntarily, her eyes twitching as though

'And Ace?'

pained.

'What?'

Vijay rose from his position on the floor and stepped over

'My friend, Ace...'

the sputtering candles. He put out his arm to hold Holly,

'Oh, I don't - I don't know. She was OK. I don't know! The withdrew it uncertainly and then tried again. She shrugged place is full of ghosts!'

him off at once.

The Doctor thought for a moment and then took Jill's

'No.'

hand kindly. 'Go back to the village and find that policeman He sighed. 'Come on, Hol. You've got me.'

friend of yours. Get as many people as you can and stay She looked at him unsteadily, her eyes flicking about.

together. Somewhere safe. Everyone is at risk! Do you Vijay touched

her cheek. ‘I don’t want you to suffer this on understand?’

your own. There’s no need.’

Jill looked dazedly at him.

Holly frowned. ‘I’m sorry. I just can’t.’

‘Do you understand?’ The Doctor shook her violently.

Vijay let his hands fall to his sides, helpless. He wandered She nodded repeatedly and put an unsteady hand to her out of the control room to the coffee machine which was still, forehead.

miraculously, functioning. Then he fumbled through the

‘Very well,’ said the Doctor determinedly. ‘I’d better get darkness to Trevithick, holding two plastic cups in his up there.’

hands.

He strode off into the night.

The old man yawned and stretched, peering about as

‘Good luck,’ Jill called, her voice scarcely a whisper.

Vijay approached.

The Doctor didn’t look back.

‘Ah, tea. Smashing.’

‘Coffee, I’m afraid. All we’ve got.’

Vijay was sitting, eyes closed, in a ring of candles. He Trevithick took the cup gratefully. ‘Never mind. I love reminded himself of the icons and embroidered pictures his coffee, I love tea, I love the Java jive and it loves me, eh?’

mother used to dot around the house back in Pakistan: Vijay smiled indulgently. ‘You’re Edmund Trevithick, angular, mystical faces full of wisdom and heavenly virtue.

aren’t you? I heard you were in the village. Always meant to But there was no such atmosphere of stillness now.

come down and see you. Big hero of mine, you were.'

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Trevithick shrugged. 'Yes, it's been lovely having all this Vijay's lip turned down in a grimace of puzzlement.

attention again, I can tell you.'

Trevithick's eyes lit up. 'Well, don't you see? They're all Vijay took a swig of his coffee. 'I remember all the kids at elements from our past. Our memories. Things we probably school used to want to be the monsters. But I wanted to be haven't thought about in years, come alive!'

Professor Nightshade. I suppose it got me started on physics Vijay folded his arms. 'But what's behind it?'

in a way. All that rocket stuff.'

He frowned and then glanced over at the dead consoles.

Trevithick chuckled. 'Well, I'm very honoured.'

'We're being bombarded by data from space, maybe...'

He gulped down his coffee in one go. It was black and

'Invaders from Mars, eh? Well, that's your province, not bitter. 'Funny that life seems to be stranger than fiction mine. At least, in the real world.'

now,' he continued. 'I gather you've had some experiences Trevithick hooked his thumbs into the pockets of his up here?'

waistcoat. 'I need a drink. A proper one, I mean.'

Vijay nodded, stooping to relume a candle which had Vijay looked across at Holly. 'I wish the Doctor would blown out. He briefly outlined Ace's discovery of the dead come back. He seems to know more than he's saying.'

security guard and Holly's experience in his room. 'And

'He knows more than we do, that's for sure,' muttered you too?'

Trevithick.

'Oh yes. Things I would never've believed possible. Those Vijay sighed. 'I just wish my mind wasn't so closed. I monsters you mentioned, for instance.'

mean, we're here to monitor radio signals from space. Why

'Monsters? What? From Nightshade you mean?'

should I be surprised if something... something intelligent Trevithick nodded heavily. 'I saw one. It attacked me.

has turned up?'

Really. A bloody monster.'

There was a gentle whirring sound as one of the consoles Vijay's mouth set in a grim line. 'I saw... a ghost, I flashed back to life. Holly was by it in an instant, her fingers suppose. That's all I can call it. It was as real as you are. It tapping away at the keyboard. Vijay dashed across the room, even threw me against the wall. And there was this stuff, knocking down a couple of candles.

like ectoplasm, condensing all over me.'

'What is it?'

Trevithick put down his cup suddenly. 'Your young Holly scanned the screen. 'Power's coming back. Slowly.

lady's late fiancé, you say?'

There's the same data from the Bellatrix nova. And

'Yes.'

something else. A sort of... pulse. Steady pulse in the

'That's interesting.'

background. Like interference. But with a pattern.'

Vijay put his head on one hand. ‘What is?’

‘Getting stronger,’ stated Vijay, flatly.

‘Miss Kidd saw her dead friend. I saw the creature from my old series. Mrs Yeadon believed that the ghost of her late Medway changed gear and slammed his foot on the brother appeared to her.’

accelerator.

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The car had spent several agonising minutes stuck in the Suddenly there was someone in his headlights, looming marshy ground by the station’s security fence before he’d into view like a spotlit statue, her hands flying to her mouth persuaded it on to the road.

as she screamed and threw herself off the road.

Ahead, the monastery seemed to burn like a Roman Medway spun the wheel to avoid her but the road ahead candle, but, when he looked again, the old building was had vanished in a mist of pain and nausea. There was just invisible against the night sky.

the moor now, somersaulting into his mind’s eye as the car He was getting out. Away from this strange place with its rolled and rolled.

missing persons and stinking corpses. Back to London and Medway’s last thoughts were of the old tinselly Christmas safety, somewhere he knew well, where there were people tree, now dazzlingly bright and beautiful. Then he screamed to love him. No, even better, he would go home. Home for and rammed his head under the dashboard as the car Christmas, just as he had been promising himself all these erupted in flame.

years.

Home.

Jill Mason ducked down as the explosion lit up the night, He would make the tea tomorrow morning. Hold his chunks of red-hot metal

whooshing across the moor. She parents tight and tell them how much he loved them.

stood up, her legs almost buckling with exhaustion and fear, Home.

as the skeleton of Medway's car burned before her.

Medway's stomach lurched as if he'd been punched, a wave of dizziness flooding through him. There was a dull,

'Bloody hell!' Robin pulled Ace to the tower window and thumping ache at the back of his neck. Sickly pain shot both their faces flashed orange as the car exploded out on across his temples and over his eyes. He took one hand off the moor.

the wheel and rubbed his forehead which was prickled with

'We'd better try and find the Doctor,' said Ace, turning icy sweat. His stomach heaved involuntarily and vomit back. 'We're no use to anyone stuck up here.'

trickled down his chin.

'No!' barked Robin. Ace looked at him.

The car jerked as he took his foot off the accelerator. He

'No,' he said more softly, 'I don't want you to. We still couldn't stop now. He had to get out. Had to.

don't know what's down there, do we? Let's stay where Then there was a wild, appalling sickness spinning we're safe, at least till it's light.'

through him and he cried out, almost losing control of the Ace checked her watch. It was close to five in the morning.

car as his hands twitched and shook. The road ahead was a

'Yeah. I suppose you're right.' She looked at him steadily.

dark black ribbon, shifting and blurring as he fought to keep

'I'm really sorry about your mum.'

a grip on his senses.

Robin nodded. ‘I was too old to think of her as my mother.

Never really got to know her, I suppose. But we were good friends. I can’t believe she’s gone, I just can’t.’

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‘Maybe that’s good,’ said Ace quietly.

Ace ruffled his hair. ‘You’re full of those clichés, aren’t

‘What d’you mean?’

you?’

‘Maybe it’s good that you can’t take it in. You’ve got to They laughed again, eyes shining.

keep your wits about you. I think the best thing you can do Perhaps she would tell him everything soon. Tell him of for her is to stay alive.’ Ace took his hand and pulled him to the wonders and the horrors she’d seen. And who she and her. They kissed again.

the Doctor really were. Perhaps...

‘Tell me about the Doctor,’ said Robin at last, stroking her The floorboards creaked loudly and Ace jumped in shock.

hair from her eyes with his delicate fingers.

She peered into the dusty corners.

Ace shrugged. ‘We travel together. He’s a sort of ... guru

‘There’s somebody there!’

for me, I suppose.’

‘Can’t be.’ Robin began to advance towards the trap door.

Robin laughed. ‘You’re not into all that hippy shit, are

‘There is!’ Ace grabbed his arm. ‘Listen!’

you?’

A heavy silence followed and then they heard the same

‘No!’ Ace grinned. “The Doctor’s ...’ She thought of a creaking of boards followed by a deep moan.

word she’d found in a little yellow-backed novel in one of

‘What the hell is it?’ Robin whispered from between the TARDIS’s less dusty rooms. ‘The Doctor’s... my mentor.

clenched teeth.

He teaches me things, shows me places. Helps me to grow Ace shook her head. Something small and dark scuttled up.’

into view, starlight from the window picking out its bent

‘You don’t seem like you need much help.’

contours.

‘Oh, I did. Still do, I suppose. Sometimes I feel like he Billy Coote walked slowly towards them, his arms stiff manipulates me. But it usually turns out for the best.

and his hair swept back from his head like a halo.

Usually.’

Ace gasped. ‘Look at his eyes!’

‘Cruel to be kind, eh?’

The old man’s black orbs jerked and twitched in their Ace nodded. ‘Something like that.’

sockets. A voice, deep and rumbling, rose from the depths She stared into the darkness and smiled. ‘He’s shown me of his chest.

so many things, so much beauty...’ Ace looked at Robin,

‘I can see it! I can see it!’

suddenly embarrassed. ‘Stuff like that.’

Then, more powerfully, the timbre becoming almost Robin could sense she was troubled. ‘But?’

musical: ‘I can see it!’

‘I’d do anything for him,’ said Ace. ‘But now... now he’s talking about jacking it all in.’

Trevithick, Vijay and Holly shot to their feet. For an Robin squeezed her hand. ‘All good things come to an instant, the sky was like an upturned crucible, fire leaving a end.’

starburst after image on their eyes.

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Holly gasped and jumped back from the window, reared up on its legs, mandibles clicking, and the others shielding her eyes.

followed suit as though obeying a silent command.

‘Mr Medway, I presume,’ said Trevithick hollowly, Gradually, very gradually, the soft rustling sound clasping his hands behind his back.

whispered into the air, rising in volume like the sound of an Vijay pulled a parka off the back of his chair. ‘I’m going to expectant crowd.

find Cooper.’

‘You see!’ cried Trevithick. ‘It’s them! Remember!’

He expected Holly to react, to ask him to stay with her as Vijay’s gaze was forced away from them for a moment as she had done before, but she just slid to the floor, gently more consoles blinked back to life. He grabbed Holly’s hand rocking herself. Vijay didn’t really want to go outside at all.

but she resisted, pressing her feet against the floor tiles.

Trevithick came to his rescue. ‘Are you sure about this, Vijay gritted his teeth and picked her up bodily.

young fella? We don't want to risk any more of us, do we?

'Mr Trevithick. Into the interior. Quick!'

It's rather like those Hammer horrors I used to do where The row of insectoid creatures sprang through the people get bumped off one by one. You always end up window, gutteral screeches escaping their jaws.

saying "Why do they go off on their own? It's so obvious!"

Trevithick yelped in fright and pelted across the room Maybe we should stick together.'

towards the interior door. The creatures' huge, glistening Vijay gave a relieved sigh. 'Well, if you think...'

bodies flashed green, then white in the glare of the consoles Shattering cracks echoed through the room as the main as they careered across the room.

window imploded. Vijay and Trevithick threw themselves Vijay hauled Holly through the door and pulled to the floor as shards of glass streaked through the air. The Trevithick by the hand till he too was through.

floor was suddenly thick with glittering particles. Vijay

'Chairs! Anything! Quickly!' Vijay shrieked as he crunched towards Holly and pulled at her shoulders. 'Hol!

slammed the door on the creatures. A mandible caught in Come on, back this way. Come on!' He jerked her round but the jamb and there was a terrifying howl as it shattered into she continued to stare at the gaping window which opened a bloody stump.

like a burst eye on to the terrifying sight beyond.

Lungs bursting, Holly and Trevithick reached the TV

Standing in a staggered line, their black carapaces glinting room in thirty seconds flat, and dragged three chairs and a in the moonlight, were half a dozen of Trevithick's monsters.

table back down the corridor. Vijay slammed the table Holly felt her skin crawl as one cocked its huge head and under the door knob as the woodwork began to splinter. A glared at her with compound eyes,

liquorice-black mucus mass of spindly mandibles erupted through the frame.

spilling from its mouth.

Trevithick hurled the wooden chairs at them.

One, a good foot taller than the rest, jerked its muscle-

‘It’s no good,’ cried Holly.

bunched legs forward, crushing glass beneath its feet. It 210

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‘Listen,’ said Vijay, grasping Trevithick by the shoulders.

He grasped the fire extinguisher and hugged it to his

‘This is a big place. Lose yourself. We’ll have to split up. If chest, then sprinted as best he could towards the lift and you can get outside, you might stand a chance.’

pressed the summons button. There was a distant clunk.

‘But surely...’

Couldn’t be far up, he thought. Perhaps most of the

‘There’s no other way.’

complex was underground? Or perhaps - he felt his heart The door shattered and three massive insectoid heads sinking -the lift ran all the way to the telescope dish?

punched through. Without another word, Holly, Vijay and He turned and felt sick as the creatures scrabbled around Trevithick turned and ran into the darkness of the corridor.

the corner like monstrous crane flies, their clawed limbs The old man skidded as he reached a corner and held on to skittering against the walls and floor. Trevithick hammered the wall for support, spluttering for breath. His chest felt on the lift doors.

tight and painful. He was too old for this. Far too old.

‘Come on! Come on!’

Holly and Vijay had gone in the general direction of their The taller creature crouched low and began to bound rooms. Trevithick glanced after them and headed right, down the corridor towards him. Once it had just been a man catching sight of a lift at the end of a long corridor.

in a rubber suit. Now it was real, a flesh-and-blood killer.

There was a tremendous clatter and disgusting twitter as There was a gentle ping and the lift doors sprang open.

the creatures burst through the door and flooded in.

Trevithick fell inside and stabbed desperately at the buttons.

Trevithick threw himself down the corridor, banging into a The doors began to slide closed with agonizing slowness.

fire extinguisher which thudded on to the floor. He stopped The creature slammed into them, its massive head beating at sharply and pounded his fists against his temples.

the metal and its mandibles thrashing in fury.

Think. Think.

Trevithick crashed the extinguisher to the floor of the lift A triumphant roar boomed down the corridor. Trevithick and aimed the nozzle at the beast. A torrent of spray fell to his knees, hands clapping on the floor tiles, and erupted into its maw and it howled in protest, head scrambled about for the fire extinguisher. It would do as a cracking against the doors as it fought to clear its vision.

weapon of sorts.

Trevithick pushed his finger on to the button again and He cast a glance at the lift doors. If the power was off he the doors began closing once more. Still the creature fought was as good as dead. But some of the consoles had come on, hooking its claws around the creaking metal doors.

back to life. There was just a chance...

Trevithick bit his lip and caught hold of its eye with shaking Trevithick strained his old eyes, cursing himself for hands. It was cold to the touch. With a great cry of effort, he leaving his spectacles, and just made out a tiny winking red brought down the extinguisher on to the compound lens light by the lift buttons. He sighed with relief and paddled and beat at it repeatedly as the creature wailed and chittered his arms across the floor.

in pain. Again and again he struck till the eye fractured and Got it.

exploded, splattering his coat in colourless fluid.

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With one final heave, he pushed the great head back into It's going to get through. It's going to get through.

the corridor and the doors clanged shut. A beautiful Trevithick gave up on the door and looked around the lift.

humming silence met his ears and he slid to the floor. The There was a knee-high tubular ashtray in one corner. In the lift went up.

ceiling was the familiar escape door he'd seen in countless Something bulky was pressing into his side and he films. He'd even crawled through one in some cheap grabbed at his jacket to remove the obstruction. With a sigh American picture his wife had persuaded him to do in order of disbelief, he pulled out his service revolver. Curse his to pay for a new fridge.

useless memory! All this time attacking the thing with a fire But this was now, this was real. Could he even squeeze extinguisher when he could've...

through the hole? And what would he do when he got there?

There was a dull thud below. The lift shook slightly but Trevithick jumped as the creature ripped through the continued its flight upwards. Trevithick looked at the floor floor. The bristly head lolled back mockingly.

indicator. He had been on Level 8, it appeared, so there Trevithick gave it two bullets in its uninjured eye.

were seven floors below ground. The indicator went up to The creature bellowed in pain and fell back some way 27. Right the way up to the dish. He swallowed nervously, through the hole in the floor. Fist-sized lenses spattered never having been good with heights. In his agitation he against the walls.

had pressed randomly. Level 15 was his destination, but Trevithick pulled at the ashtray which fell and spilled its that was bound to be beyond the creatures' reach, wasn't it?

contents. He picked it up and jammed it against the wall, At Level 15, the lift shook again. Trevithick frowned, got pocketing his revolver and casting an anxious glance at the to his feet and waited for the doors to open. Nothing hole in the floor. The creature's claws were scrabbling about happened. He placed the flat of his hands against the cool again, making a fresh attempt to pull itself into the lift.

metal and tried to push the doors apart.

Trevithick tore at the expensive lining of his jacket until it With a terrifying screech, the lift floor buckled as the ripped across, then stuffed the fire extinguisher inside. It creature attempted to punch its way through. Trevithick was bulky and heavy but, once he was out of bullets, it was gave a little whimper and thrust his fingernails between the the only weapon he had.

doors. He had been so desperate to get in, now...

Without another moment's hesitation, he climbed on to Please, please, please...

the wobbling ashtray and reached towards the ceiling hatch.

The creature must have forced its way through the He pushed with his fingertips but the hatch resisted. Why exterior set of doors and clung to the bottom of the lift as it was nothing going right for him?

ascended. Trevithick felt his pulse hammering in his temple.

With a roar, the creature hauled itself over the lip of the He looked down at the floor which had cracked right across.

hole and clawed at the carpet, dragging its disgusting body A

harpoonlike claw was thrashing through the hole, inside. This was all the incentive Trevithick required. He attempting to gain purchase on the floor.

punched the hatch out and gazed through at chilly darkness.

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The creature had one leg through now, sliding through the hole like a monstrous dragonfly sloughing off its old skin.

Trevithick managed to get his arms through the hatch up to the elbows and howled with effort as he tried to pull himself through. The ashtray below him shook unsteadily as the beast fell inside the lift. Trevithick was through up to his waist, his old arms seared by pain. Cold sweat flooded down his face.

The creature stood upright, uncurling its enormous body and chittering in triumph. Trevithick thanked God he was wearing his steel-toed boots, and kicked it savagely in both wounded eyes. It lashed out instantly, ripping through his trousers to his bare flesh underneath. Trevithick cried out in pain and kicked again, struggling

to retain his fragile grip on the top of the lift.

Again it fell, spraying the lift walls with black blood.

The creature's maw dripped with fluid as it thrust its head Trevithick looked about him desperately. The lift shaft was towards Trevithick's legs. With a titanic effort he pulled totally dark. His only choice was to attempt a climb up to himself right through the hatch, curled around, pulled out the next level and somehow prise open the doors which led his revolver and pumped two more bullets into the creature.

to safety. But, in his heart, he knew this was impossible. He hadn't the strength left and his plans failed to include one thing. The creature.

It was roaring and slamming at the ceiling hatch now, determined to break through and find him. Trevithick shivered, half through fear and half through cold. He glanced at his old revolver. Two bullets left.

Then a wild idea lit up his brain. He scrabbled about inside his jacket and pulled out the fire extinguisher. The creature was half blind now anyway. All he needed to do was complete the process and then... It was too perfect! The extinguisher didn't spray foam; it was for electrical fires, 216

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obviously the main worry in a place like the tracking station.

and stabbed his finger decisively on to the Level 18 button.

So it contained carbon dioxide. Compressed carbon dioxide!

The lift began to ascend immediately, stranding the creature Trevithick checked his gun again unnecessarily. Two on the cable, its claws scraping and slipping on the metal.

bullets. He would need only one. He tore off his jacket and Trevithick lay down by the hole and took out his revolver crouched by the hatch, holding his breath. The creature's with careful deliberation. He gazed through the hole in the head was through now, peering about in the gloom to locate floor and watched the creature diminish in size.

him. Trevithick slid across the lift so he was behind it, At Level 18, the

lift stopped and, to Trevithick's relief, the holding his jacket in one hand and the extinguisher in the doors sprang open. Instantly, he slid the tubular ashtray on other. He said a silent prayer and then launched himself at to the threshold to prevent the doors closing, then looked the creature.

back down the hole.

He delivered a kick to its eye and instantly sprayed its The creature was struggling up the cable, the shiny entire head with carbon dioxide, then cocooned the head extinguisher glinting on one of its hooked spines. He cocked with his jacket and flung himself and the creature back into his revolver and took aim.

the lift.

The creature's head rolled back as it saw his face. It roared Trevithick's whole body screamed in pain but he in fury and redoubled its efforts, wrapping its vicious claws wouldn't give up now. Whilst the creature thrashed about around the cable.

the confined space, utterly disorientated, he fired one more Trevithick had been a crack shot during the War, had bullet into its head. It reeled and fell to the floor.

even won medals for it. But this shot had to count. Had to.

Summoning all his strength, Trevithick fell to his knees and He aimed for the extinguisher and pulled the trigger.

barged the creature through the hole it had ripped in the The bullet hit the compressed carbon dioxide and floor. Its claws clattered desperately for purchase. Trevithick Trevithick was out of the lift in seconds, wrenching the looked at its knobbly back and at one hooked spine in ashtray away so the doors would shut.

particular. That would do very well, he thought.

The creature was instantly consumed by fire, guttural Dodging to evade its razor-sharp claws, Trevithick screams forcing their way through its dreadful gullet. It let hooked the extinguisher on to the creature's back and then go of the cable as flames tore through every fibre of its body, jumped on to the huge black head like a child on a falling backwards and down, down into the shaft like a trampoline, beating and beating till his boots sank into the shooting star.

brittle tissue. The creature screeched, twisting around in an Trevithick watched the lift doors close and listened to the effort to save itself. Trevithick gave one last kick and the satisfying roar as the extinguisher exploded. He dragged thing slid through the hole into the shaft.

himself to the wall and closed his eyes.

Immediately, it lashed one claw on to the cable and tried Did it. Did it.

to haul itself back inside. Trevithick was prepared, however, He allowed himself a little smile.

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The monastery had lost all the cheeriness of his earlier It was almost dawn as the Doctor pulled open the doors of visits. Now it was a cold and lonely place. No wonder the the monastery. The hinges had buckled and the wood itself Abbot had seemed so maudlin.

seemed to have expanded against the stone frame.

The Doctor looked down at the dusty flagstones, half-The room beyond was unnaturally quiet, lit only by a reminded of something. There was another smell in the air: couple of stubby candles. The smell hit the Doctor almost a musty, neglected smell so common in old religious immediately and he thrust his coat sleeve across his face.

buildings.

Over by the long-extinct fire, several indistinct shapes There was a sudden, distinct plop as a rain drop fell to the were huddled. The Doctor picked his way through the floor. The Doctor gazed up at the darkened roof. Another smashed furniture, steeling himself for what he knew he drop fell and splashed coldly on his forehead.

would find.

Leaking roof.

Three monks lay curled like embryos. The Doctor All at once, he knew what it reminded him of. A recognised them only by their scorched habits. All other forbidden place. A chamber with a secret door, the key to features were ravaged and wasted, skeletal hands projecting which he had once stolen. Such a long time ago...

from folds of grey material.

There was a light scampering of feet in the darkness and The Doctor looked across towards an old armchair in the Doctor whirled round.

which a just-recognizable Mr Peel was sitting, his blotched, In the dim candle-glow, he could make out a small, dark-purple head thrust back against the antimacassar. The haired girl, though her face was lost in shadow.

Doctor stepped over to the corpse and, almost without His stomach turned as he recognised the neat grey thinking, touched the bony head. It fell forward with a pinafore with its red and gold embroidered badge.

splintering crack, hit the floor and vanished like a

'Grandfather?' said the girl, giggling. 'Where have you mushroom spore in an explosion of dust.

been?'

The Doctor's gaze ranged around the room at the scores of The Doctor's mouth went dry as dust. His shoulders fell lifeless figures, petrified in attitudes of horror like the and an exhausted gasp slipped from his lips.

residents of Pompeii.

'Susan!'

'As if the life had been drawn out of them,' he muttered.

Without the fire, a creeping dampness had gripped the Chapter Nine

room. The Doctor wandered towards the cloister door, Christmas Day dawned with some uncertainty, the sun a shivering in spite of himself.

pale circle of light against the white sky, like a neat hole

'Ace?' he called, half-heartedly. Could she have escaped punched in

the clouds.

this carnage? Was she one of the unrecognisable corpses Freezing fog began to roll over the moor, drifting around strewn about the room? ‘Ace?’

the base of the monastery like smoke from an Arctic fire.

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In the attic chamber, Ace and Robin were running out of

‘Come on, then,’ cried Ace, reaching for the lintel.

options. Billy Coote stood above the trap door, gurgling softly. His skin was giving off a faint luminescence and his The Doctor leant against a wall, his whole frame bent with twitching, glazed black eyes were focused directly at them.

emotion.

‘We can’t get past him,’ cried Ace, looking around the

‘Susan,’ he said dully.

room desperately. Her rucksack, with its precious load of Yet it couldn’t be. Couldn’t be...

climbing ropes, was propped against a wall, far too close to A tide of regret and grief overwhelmed him and he almost the advancing stranger for her to retrieve.

cried out.

Robin popped his head through the stone arch of the

‘I’ve missed you so much, my dear,’ he croaked, breath window. Dawn light bled feebly inside.

broken by sobs.

He looked down at the moor. Too far to climb unaided.

There was already a curious luminescence in Susan's dark But the slate-covered roof of the tower was only a few feet hair. She turned her elfin face towards him and her eyes above them.

were full of forgiveness.

'We can get to the roof with a bit of effort,' he said.

'You were always such an old worrier, Grandfather.'

Ace nodded quickly. 'That's an idea. But we could wait The Doctor's mind raced, recalling all the precious times till he moves away from the trap door and then try and get he'd spent with her. Then a dark strand of memory rose up down the stairs.'

in his consciousness and he saw again Dalek-ravaged

'Down the stairs to whatever was in the Hall? That's why London, Ian and Barbara, and Susan with the man she had we came up here, remember?'

grown to love.

Ace grinned. 'Oh yeah.' She shot another glance at her

'You had to leave me with David, Grandfather. It was rucksack. 'If we can get...'

what I wanted, after all,' she said, as though reading his Billy Coote took a step towards them. His mouth clicked thoughts.

open, saliva dribbling over his lips. An anguished, chilling He'd abandoned her on an alien world in an alien time, moan echoed throughout the room.

losing his last link with all that he could call home. Since

'Roof it is,' said Ace, quickly.

then, there had been but one brief meeting, during the They clambered through the window and crouched on the Borusa incident. No time to talk. No time to make up for all stone sill. Ace looked up. It was a climb of about five or six those lost years.

feet, over a section of ancient lead guttering and then on to

‘One day, I shall come back,’ he had said. But that day had the roof. She scanned the masonry with expert eyes. There never arrived. He had been too caught up in his own selfish were a couple of good handholds.

concerns, his ceaseless journeying through the Vortex. What Billy Coote arched his back and emitted another deep was he running away from anymore? Only himself.

moan.

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Susan gave a little laugh, the light, lovely laugh he had One man stirred, however, and the weak sunshine made always cherished. She had called him ‘Grandfather’, and in Lawrence Yeadon squint as he turned up the collar of his that simple phrase was bound up so much feeling, so much overcoat and made his way towards The Shepherd’s Cross.

tenderness. Had he ever let anyone else get so close?

He glanced around at the eerie emptiness, straining to What was before him now was not Susan. He knew that.

hear any sign of life. With a heavy sigh, he pushed open the But seeing her there, just as he remembered her, was almost door of the pub and stepped inside.

too much to bear. He could feel himself moving towards her.

The taproom was silent and deserted, discarded glasses

‘Susan,’ he whispered.

and plates littering the tables. Lawrence walked listlessly She smiled, and in that moment, the Doctor caught a tiny around the room, his face drawn and haggard. He glanced flicker in her expression. The eyes seemed suddenly colder, at the tinsel which hung across the bar and shuddered as a harsher.

sob caught in his throat. Betty.

‘No,’ he said flatly.

She was gone. The woman who had brought meaning to Susan reared up, her body elongating like an uncoiled his life. Gone.

snake. For an instant, her smiling face remained. Then it fell It had been hell after the death of his first wife. He had away, leaving only a terrible darkness around which her struggled to bring up Robin as best he could. No one, hair whispered.

Lawrence included, ever really expected him to get over it.

She held out her hands in an embrace and began to giggle, But Betty’s love had helped him, healed the wounds, an awful, sick sound that made the Doctor’s hair stand on restored the joy to his existence.

end.

He could see her now, just as she had been that summer’s Susan’s body was expanding now into trails of light, her afternoon in York, the sun beating down on her hair, her mocking laughter echoing around the deserted hall.

laugh echoing through the hot, still streets.

The Doctor cried out in anguish and grief, looking around Now she was gone. Claimed by some force he couldn’t frantically for an exit. He spotted the well of the spiral stairs even begin to comprehend.

and bolted across the room, running for his life.

Lawrence slid into a chair. He had to pull himself together.

The fog from the moor poured down the empty streets of George Lowcock had called at Mrs Bass’s place late the Crook Marsham, blanketing the peal of the distant bells of previous night, talking about Jill Mason having some York Minster, six miles away. It was a rousing, jubilant terrible fright over at the monastery and how important it sound, greeting the festive morning effusively.

was to get everyone together for their own safety.

Yet in the village no one stirred.

Lawrence had suggested the church and said he’d meet An icy wind

whipped through the main street, setting the them all there at eight on Christmas morning. He checked butcher's sign swinging.

his watch. Nearly time.

Somewhere, there was a soft, soft rustling sound.

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First, though, he had needed to see the pub again, needed Holly lay asleep next to him, a few filthy blankets thrown to put himself in touch with Betty by seeing the things she'd over her.

seen.

They had hidden themselves in the security guard's hut He got to his feet and forced himself up the stairs. The after a petrified dash through the station.

police had taken away what was left of her and the Luckily for them, but unluckily for Trevithick, the bedroom door had been nailed shut.

creatures seemed intent on pursuing the old man, racing Lawrence paused by the door and pressed his cheek after him into the interior of the building.

against the panels, sobbing.

Holly had been keen to make for the village but Vijay He checked his watch again through tear-misted eyes.

thought this might expose them to still more danger. Better Get a grip.

to hide till they could get their bearings.

He would talk to George. Everything would be fine.

Sometime during the night, there had been a tremendous, Everything could be explained. Then he had to find Robin.

muffled explosion from somewhere inside the station and Say sorry.

Make sure he was safe.

Vijay had uttered a silent prayer for Trevithick. If the old Lawrence turned from the door. There was a sudden, man had gone down, he would certainly have been fighting sharp noise like scratching. He froze.

to the end.

It came again. An insistent scraping like a dog demanding Holly had slept better than Vijay and this troubled him. It to be let outside.

was as if she had found an easy escape route from her Lawrence looked down at the door. It was shaking troubles, blocking out the horrors by refusing to accept slightly.

them.

‘Lol?’

Vijay stood up stiffly, carefully resting Holly’s head on his His name. Stated in a dry, dead whisper.

discarded blanket, and tiptoed through the piles of rusted

‘Lol?’

junk towards the door.

He bent down and stared at the door. Something was Daggers of icy wind slipped under the door. He opened it pawing at the broken lower panels, pleading to be released.

and grimaced as the harsh white daylight dazzled his eyes.

Quaking with fear, Lawrence put an eye to the splintered He could scarcely see the moor which stretched out before wood and peered through into the room.

him. Dense fog and heavy clouds had blended together, He caught his breath. Then a laugh resounded through his forming a freezing envelope around the station.

mind. A hearty musical laugh he’d first heard on a faraway Then he noticed the fence and dashed outside, slamming summer’s day...

the door without thinking.

The perimeter fence, whose impregnability had so Vijay

opened

exhausted

eyes,

lifted

his

head

impressed Dr Hawthorne, lay broken and smashed. It was experimentally and found his neck to be stiff and painful.

how Vijay imagined a prison camp to look after a mass 226

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breakout. The steel mesh was beaten down and each post Vijay stood up. ‘We’ll drive into the village. They must was missing or broken off like a cemetery pillar.

have some idea what’s going on by now. Maybe we can do Vijay spun around, the telescope dish looming overhead, something.’

and took in the devastation. Something extraordinary had

‘I think we should find the Doctor.’

happened during the night.

‘Yeah. So do I. But let’s get away from here first, eh?’ Vijay Holly appeared, rubbing her face. She seemed a little hooked his arm around her and held her chin in his other brighter, kissing her lover full on the lips and hugging him hand. ‘I love you, you know.’

close. She saw the fence over his shoulder and gasped.

She smiled sweetly, squeezed his hand and set off for the

‘Think it was those things?’

Land Rover.

Vijay shrugged. ‘Can’t have just been them, the whole Vijay pulled open the door and leant across to open the fence is down.’ He peered across at one of the posts. ‘Hang passenger side. He stiffened as a low groan murmured on.’

through the air. Holly looked at him through the Holly pulled her blanket tightly around her as Vijay windscreen and shrugged. Vijay got out of the Land Rover.

wandered over to the fence. She watched him feel about in The groan came again, stronger this time. Vijay pushed the heather for a moment then look around himself again.

Holly away from the truck and pricked up his ears. It was

‘Holly!’ he called.

coming from underneath the vehicle. Gingerly, he squatted She wandered towards him, stepping over the remains of down and blinked into the shadows.

the fence.

‘Christ! Holly! Give me a hand!’

‘The ground’s uneven,’ said Vijay, wonderingly.

He thrust his arm under the chassis and pulled at the

‘Subsidence?’

prostrate figure lying there. The grizzled hair was matted

‘Must be. The fence hasn’t been knocked down, the with blood and the fierce blue eyes flickered weakly.

ground itself has been disrupted.’ He squatted on his

‘Dr Cooper!’ cried Holly delightedly, shunting her haunches and indicated the heather. ‘And look at this.’

colleague into a sitting position against the wheel.

Holly bent down. ‘It’s scorched.’

Cooper lifted an eyelid. ‘Holly?’ She inclined her head.

Vijay nodded and swung his arm around in an arc. ‘All

‘Vijay?’ A sigh bubbled from her lips. ‘Thank God.’

the way round, I reckon.’

‘We thought you were dead,’ said Vijay. Cooper coughed.

Holly frowned. ‘Like a giant fairy ring.’

‘Should be, by rights. Those beasties…’ She shook her head An icy gust ruffled her hair. ‘What about Mr Trevithick …

disbelievingly. ‘One caught me across the forehead but I and Cooper?’

managed to get under here. Must’ve passed out.’ Holly Vijay sighed. ‘Maybe they got away.’

hugged the older woman. Cooper patted her back Holly hung her head despondently.

affectionately.

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Vijay stood up suddenly, his keen gaze fixing on York. George Lowcock, however, kept the keys in the something. He wandered away towards the fence.

bottom drawer of his desk and that Christmas morning, he

‘Hawthorne?’ croaked Cooper weakly. Holly shook her opened the ancient doors to convene his meeting.

head. ‘The old man too, probably. The Doctor went off to Now the dingy interior was crammed with villagers.

the monastery.’

Lowcock had done his rounds late on Christmas Eve, telling Cooper

nodded, her eyes closing. ‘Holly?’ Vijay’s voice everyone to be in the church for eight the next morning as cut through the moan of the wind. ‘Will you be OK a there was a bit of a flap on. He was shocked to discover how moment?’ asked Holly urgently. Cooper nodded, fingering few people answered his knock. It was almost as though the wound on her forehead with some distaste. ‘Holly!’

they had all gone away.

Vijay was walking up and down in agitation just beyond Mr Bayles, Crook Marsham’s butcher for thirty years, the edge of the fallen fence. Holly ran over to him, the seemed to have upped and left, fresh turkeys abandoned on question on her lips answered by the sight of the great, his counter. Old Mr Pemberton at the post office, who had tumulus-like mound of earth heaped before her.

never been more than thirty miles from the village in his life, The subsidence had opened a gash in the moor some had similarly vanished.

thirty feet across. The soil yawned above a crooked cave It was only when Lowcock called on Win Prudhoe that his mouth, with broken stones and clods of earth littering the suspicions became a sick certainty. These people hadn’t left entrance. The ring of scorched heather extended right Crook Marsham. They had been taken, consumed, just like around it.

the others they had found.

‘What did the Doctor say this place was built on?’ said He’d knocked lightly on the door and pushed it slowly Vijay, knowing the answer. Holly nodded excitedly.

open until it banged against the umbrella stand. There was a Vijay turned back to the pitch-black chasm. ‘I think we’ve burnt smell in the air and clouds of what appeared to be just found his palaeolithic quarry.’

steam hanging low under the rafters.

The stones of Crook Marsham’s little church had echoed Gingerly, with heart pounding, Lowcock walked through to the sound of Christmas Day worship for almost nine the sitting room, looking about at dusty furniture and old hundred years. Rows of creaking pews gave on to an aisle photographs. There was one of Jack Prudhoe and old so worn down that it formed a channel rather than a straight Andrew

Medcalfe, shoulder to shoulder on the day they path, making the whole interior resemble a heavily rigged had both gone off to war.

ship, the towering pulpit looking like some ecclesiastical

‘Hello? Mrs Prudhoe?’

fo’c’s’le.

He knew, with a dread that made his head reel, that she Attendance had dwindled to such an extent that the was no longer alive. Easing open the kitchen door, he church had been closed for all but the most special occasions.

noticed at once that the kettle had boiled itself dry on the Those villagers still devoted enough took the bus over to stove, little tongues of gas flame licking at its blackened 230

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underside. Then he glanced down at the bundle of rags in The Doctor’s head brushed against the trap door and he the corner and failed to stifle a scream.

stood up, pushing against the wood with the flat of his

‘Mrs Prudhoe, then?’ Jill asked him as he ushered the last hands until it gave, crashing against the stone floor of the of a depopulated village into the church. Lowcock nodded attic chamber.

heavily. ‘Same as the others. Withered. Decomposed.’ He He poked his head through and peered into the gloom. A slammed shut the church doors. ‘You sit yourself down, moaning wind, accompanied by a beam of weak, diffused love. You’ve done enough.’

sunlight, was blowing through the glassless window. All

‘I’m all right,’ said Jill determinedly, resenting his else was shadow.

patronising tone in spite of her experiences.

The Doctor hauled himself through and, with a grunt, The confused residents of Crook Marsham, some fifty or slammed shut the trap

door.

sixty people, were conversing in low, frightened voices.

He walked to the window and gazed out on to the moor a Lowcock strode up the aisle and mounted the pulpit to hundred feet below. The light made him wince and he make the most difficult speech of his life.

turned back to the room. Tears sprang to his eyes. Just the light, he told himself, just the light.

The Doctor was running blind, the curved walls of the Sliding down the wall, the tails of his duffel coat folding tower blurring past him. He forced himself to concentrate under him, the Doctor breathed in deeply. He'd been on the steps under his shoes, stone by stone, as he rose ever through so much. Ridden so many of the waves of Time.

higher. The Abbot's landing appeared and then was gone.

Yet, for all those years, he'd put his own feelings to one Stone by stone. Stone by stone.

side, tucked them away as if they were of no importance.

Up and up he ran, his legs wracked with pain and his Now the full weight of his troubles was becoming clear.

mind reeling, a succession of confusing images glittering Instead of trying to confront his insecurities, like any before his eyes.

rational being, he had buried them deep in his psyche.

Susan.

He was the Doctor, after all, and expected to be immune Susan but... not Susan. Why did it have to be her? As if the to such things. Above such trivial matters as emotion and thing were focusing in on his darkest thoughts, exacerbating longing and... love.

the very feelings which had brought him to such a crisis.

It was only a matter of time before all those repressed It knew. It knew.

feelings flooded his system like poison from an untreated With a cry, the Doctor banged into the trap door which wound.

led into the attic chamber. He sat down wearily, wheezing Something glinted in the hard winter sunlight and the for breath, and buried his head in his hands. The steps up Doctor reached out a trembling hand to pick it up. It was a which he had run remained dark and silent. There was no flat, coiled metal object, cool to the touch. With a start, the sign that the apparition had followed him.

Doctor recognised it as the earring Ace had picked up on 232

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their visit to Segonax. The one she had taken to wearing in her left ear.

‘Ace?’

She was here then, or had been. The Doctor stood up, sensing movement in the dusty shadows.

Twin oak beams dominated the far corner and, between them, a shambling figure was stirring.

The Doctor recognised Billy Coote from their encounter in the Great Hall. But there was something different about him now.

As the Doctor moved closer, Billy emerged into the light, stumbling forwards on his knees as though in great pain.

His face was deathly pale and clammy with little beads of sweat.

The Doctor shuddered as tiny particles of skin fell away Ace jammed her feet into the guttering and clung on to from Billy's face like old plaster, allowing radiant points of Robin. He responded by nudging closer, placing his warm light to shine through the pock-marks.

hand over hers.

The Doctor put out his hand with some trepidation.

They had been lying against the slates in this way for Billy Coote's eyes snapped open and the Doctor gasped.

some time. It was freezing cold and Ace would rather have There was no colour in those orbs now, not even the opaque attempted escape, but without her rucksack it seemed black which had so scared Ace and Robin. Billy's eyes were impossible. Still, she could wait. And as soon as that bloke utterly transparent, like two spheres of aspic jelly, a strange, in the attic got out of the way...

dull light exposing every capillary and nerve.

Ace remembered suddenly that her rucksack might contain something even more useful, that was, if she'd bothered to pack it. She looked up at the featureless sky.

Any attempt to negotiate the frost-covered roof would be suicidal, so they had remained perched on the sheer slates, clinging together for dear life and bodily warmth. Under different circumstances it would have been a delight, thought Ace, tightly gripping this lovely bloke, feeling the pressure of his warm body against hers. But circumstances

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weren't different. They were the same as they always were and a chunk of light, solid as a film beam in a dark cinema, when travelling with the Doctor. Bloody dangerous.

poured out.

Ace checked her watch. It was well after eight in the The Doctor moved back a little.

morning.

Some sort of mental link, he thought.

'Ace?'

Possession?

She jerked alert as the Doctor's voice sounded from the Billy Coote's wizened chest began to heave. From deep, room below.

deep within his ribs came a rustling sound. He began to

'Robin!' she hissed. 'It's him. The Doctor! He's in there!'

mouth noiselessly, his lips splitting and cracking as light The boy craned his neck to look at her. 'What can we do?

flooded through.

Get him up here?'

Something inside the old man gave out a dreadful Ace shook her head. 'No point. Maybe things've croaking moan and the Doctor shuddered. Then it spoke.

quietened down in there. If the Doctor got in, we should be able to get out.'

Nightshade was running.

Carefully, she slid down the roof and leant over the gutter, There wasn't much time, he knew, and the rocket had to straining to hear more. She closed her eyes, feeling sick, as be launched soon or else - or else ...

the ground jumped into view a hundred feet below. What Around him, the air steamed and hissed, smoke belching was the Doctor doing in there?

from the massive steel furnaces which crowded the complex.

Three domes, their fabric buckled and blackened, loomed Billy Coote was slumped against the wall like an into view and he chose the first, scurrying up the twisting abandoned scarecrow, his arms limp at his sides. The ladder on to the gantry section. He looked down at the flat Doctor was crouched on his haunches, gazing in awe at the concrete far below and felt queasy. Heights had never been old man's luminous eyes and the weird light streaming his strong point.

from every crevice of his leathery skin.

But what was that below? A body? Lying lifeless on the baked ground, its features coated in black slime. Of course.

'Who are you?' said the Doctor gently.

Barclay! How could he have forgotten? Barclay was dead.

Billy stirred slightly, his hair rustling agitatedly as energy Barclay had sacrificed his life so that they might escape. But began to build around him. Filigrees of electric-blue light where had he, Nightshade, been? Why hadn't he even tried shivered over his flesh.

to save the young man?

'Who are you?' said the Doctor again.

There had been something else. Something very pressing.

Billy's eyes rolled in their sockets, the dull light suddenly

'Nightshade...'

blazing intensely from them. He opened his wizened mouth That voice again. Chuckling. Chuckling.

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And suddenly the complex vanished, replaced by the He struggled to his feet and, with some trepidation, deeply inset window of an eighteenth-century farmhouse.

pressed the summons button. The doors sprang open Nightshade looked down. There was a television in the immediately.

corner of the room and his own face was on the screen, There was a strong smell of burning inside the lift and grimacing in horror as a vicious insectoid claw burst Trevithick held his breath as he crossed the threshold, through the window.

carefully avoiding the gaping hole which the creature had Nightshade turned around and retched as an appalling ripped through the floor.

smell assaulted his nostrils. This was all wrong. This His jacket lay in tatters in the corner next to the tubular belonged to someone else's life.

ashtray and there were black bloodstains all over the walls.

He fell back against the armchair as the window shattered, It had been real, then. He breathed out noisily.

a great, glistening black claw ramming its way inside.

Trevithick pressed the Level 8 button and the doors slid

'Trevithick,' rustled the voice.

shut with a soft click.

Trevithick

He had little idea what he would do when he got to the Trevithick

control room; after all, daylight was only safe in fairy stories.

Trevithick blinked twice and opened his eyes. He was What if there were more of them waiting for him? It would lying with his back against the wall of the same corridor certainly be the end. He hadn't the strength left to...

into which he had tumbled the previous night.

Trevithick frowned as the floor indicator reached Level 8

He craned his neck and looked over towards the tiny and then continued downwards. A cold chill ran through portal through which daylight was streaming. The dish of him. Not again. Not more.

the telescope dominated the view.

He'd always had a horror of being inside a plummeting Of course, he was on Level 18. That's where he'd reached lift. Was this it? Wasn't there a position he had to assume, after destroying the creature. Then he must've dropped off bend his knees or something? Or was that just an old wives'

to sleep.

tale?

He cursed his old body again. This wasn't the time for The lift, however, continued to descend in its own stately frailty. He had to make sure the others were all right. He way.

had defeated that monster, but there had been at least five Trevithick jabbed at the Level 8 button again but there others. Getting back to the control room was now a priority.

was no response. He glanced down at the floor and felt Trevithick looked about for a doorway, expecting an compelled to peer through the hole out into the dark shaft.

entrance to a flight of stairs, but the corridor walls were Grunting with effort, he crouched down on his hands and blank. He turned and regarded the closed lift doors with knees and put his face as close as he dared to the hole.

dread. That was obviously his only way down.

Expecting only darkness, Trevithick was taken aback by the sight which met his eyes.

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The lift was descending into a network of glowing light, The room was buzzing with energy once more, the noise wisps of fiery energy cocooning the entire shaft like a from various machines almost deafening.

spectral spider's web.

'Any change?' said Vijay as Cooper hobbled back to her There was a deep, throbbing pulse emanating from the consoles.

light as it progressed upwards.

She sifted through a sheaf of paper and frowned. 'There's Upwards.

a real pattern now. Still makes no sense, but it's a pattern.

Trevithick got to his feet and pressed the first button that Regular. Like a pulse.'

met his trembling fingers. Nothing happened.

'A pulse,' said Holly calmly.

He swore savagely and kept his finger on the button until Vijay ran his fingers through his hair. 'I still don't see how the nail whitened.

a nova could produce this kind of data.'

It seemed as though the lift were being dragged Holly slapped herself across the forehead. 'It's so bloody inexorably down into the pulsing entity below.

obvious!'

Insubstantial tendrils were already groping their way Cooper smiled. 'What is?'

through the hole in the floor.

'The Doctor was right all the time, only he didn't know Trevithick panicked and stabbed at the 'doors open'

what about. We've been acting on the assumption that all control, his whole frame shaking in fear. The floor indicator this data is coming from space. Because that's where it's showed Level 5.

supposed to come from!'

To his inexpressible relief, the doors sprang open and he

'From the nova?' said Cooper quizzically.

threw himself out of the lift into another darkened corridor.

‘No! We couldn’t see the wood for the trees. The nova is Trevithick groped his way through the blackness and his incidental. The energy isn’t coming from space at all. It’s hand clapped on to a cold, steel banister. Thank God, at underneath us.’

least there were stairs at this level.

Cooper whistled. ‘That would explain why it’s flooded He forced his weary legs on to the damp concrete. It was the systems. Too local to make any sense.’

now vital that he found his friends. There was something Vijay looked at her excitedly. ‘But what is it? The Doctor’s alive down here. Alive and growing.

ghost thing?’

Holly shook her head. ‘I don’t know.’

Holly and Vijay helped Cooper through the double doors Cooper sat down and pouted her lower lip. ‘Well, call me and then into the control room.

alarmist if you like, but it strikes me we’re not in the best of

‘Now what?’ said Holly. ‘The village?’

positions here.’

Vijay shook his head. ‘No, this changes things. If Dr Vijay looked down gravely. ‘We’re sitting on a powder Cooper survived, then maybe old Trevithick did too. I think keg.’

we owe it to him to at least look.’

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The Doctor rocked on his haunches.

Ace was hanging from Robin's legs as he hooked his

'How long?' he whispered.

fingers into the guttering. It was horribly unsafe and he Billy Coote inclined his head, his whole frame now gritted his teeth, mixing blind optimism with prayers to his flickering with light.

neglected deity.

'How long have you been here?' urged the Doctor.

'OK?' he gasped.

There was a strange, whispering groan, merging with the

'Yeah. Hold on.' Ace scrambled down his legs and pushed familiar rustling sound. Then the voice, halting, dry and her boot into the same wall crevice she had found the dead as stone: 'All time. Since before the world.'

previous night. If she could just keep a grip on the stone and The Doctor frowned. 'Before the world?'

swing herself back through the window...

Billy raised a spindly arm along which flurries of blue

'You get back on the roof!' she shouted to Robin. 'I'll get light were dancing. 'All time.'

the rope strung up and then you can come down. OK?'

The Doctor changed tack. 'What are you?'

He hissed his assent, struggling to breathe as Ace The thing within Billy Coote seemed to shudder and for clambered down him.

an instant there was a vile movement beneath his She reached his ankles and her feet found the top of the transparent skin, like a specimen in a jar suddenly jerking to stone window. Carefully, she pushed her fingers into the life.

crumbling masonry and scrambled through into the attic

'Know not,' it mumbled. 'Know not. Just am.' Billy's head chamber.

slumped on to his chest, columns of light bursting from

‘Doctor!’

every pore. ‘So tired. So tired.’

He held up his hand to silence her. Ace gawped at the The Doctor rubbed his chin thoughtfully and moved back thing in the corner.

still further. Energy seemed to be seeping from Billy’s body, Billy Coote’s whole body was alive with crackling light, pooling under his legs and beneath his back.

billowing around him in nebulous clouds.

‘Do you know ...’ the Doctor began. ‘Do you know where

‘He’s possessed,’ whispered the Doctor. ‘Possessed by you’ve come from?’

whatever it is.’

The voice gave a guttural choke, as though willing itself

‘All time,’ it burbled, ectoplasmic fluid gushing from the back into life. ‘Only ever here. Alone. Cannot rest. Cannot light-blanched mouth. ‘Need! Need!’

rest.’

The Doctor leant forward as close as he dared. ‘What do The light in Billy’s eyes seemed to blaze again for an you need?’

instant.

Billy Coote’s body flickered for a moment and then, like a

‘Need!’ it rustled. ‘Need!’

distant image in a heat haze, vanished into the shimmering wall of light.

Ace spotted her rucksack, now a good few feet from what Robin launched himself back through the window and was left of Billy Coote. She scrambled across the room and began to descend the rope.

picked it up, immediately retreating to the window.

Ace cupped the explosives in her hand and turned around.

‘We’ve got to get out, Doctor!’

The Doctor was against the wall, the huge miasma of energy The Doctor glanced at the trap door, which was now floating about him. It was roaring with power now, totally enveloped by the clouds of whispering energy.

beautiful colours like frozen flames rippling within its

‘Need!’ bellowed the disembodied voice.

nebulous structure.

Ace found a coil of rope in her rucksack and hastily tied

‘Need you!’ came the chuckling voice.

one end around the nearest beam. It was further from the

‘Doctor! Get away from it!’ cried Ace in a hoarse whisper.

window than she would have liked but it would have to do.

She rolled the globes of nitro-nine-A across the floor.

She ran back to the window and fed the rope down the wall.

‘No, Ace!’ yelled the Doctor.

It was a good twenty feet short.

The cloud’s tendrils retreated a little, slipping around the

‘Robin!’ cried Ace, pushing her head through the stone explosives inquisitively.

arch. ‘Come on!’

Ace grabbed the hood of the Doctor's coat and dragged

'What do you need?' shouted the Doctor to the air around him towards the window. She found the rope and pulled him.

herself through, abseiling down the face of the tower.

A tendril of energy appeared and stroked his face almost Freezing wind bit at her face and hands. She looked up. The tenderly.

Doctor was just emerging through the window. Looking

'Need you,' gushed the voice. 'Need your life. Warm life!'

down, she saw Robin gazing up at them. He was all right.

'Doctor!' screeched Ace. She tipped up her rucksack. No Ace pushed her feet off the stones and slid down the rope, more rope. Just a small collapsible ladder and... and...

trying to ignore the vicious burning sensation it induced.

Two globes of nitro-nine-A.

The end of the rope came in sight and she jammed her She'd been right then. Thank God she had foresight.

fingers into the brickwork. Twenty feet to go. Twenty feet.

It was the same formula she'd brewed up in Nazi And that nitro was so unstable...

Germany during their fight with the Timewyrm. Bit of an She looked up anxiously. The Doctor was still too high up.

unstable formula but effective. And that was what they

'Come on, Doctor!'

needed now.

Her voice was blown back at her by the wind.

Robin pulled himself through the window but Ace

'Ace!' Robin cried, holding out his arms to grab her. 'Jump!

immediately shook her head.

You’re close enough!’

‘No time! Get down the rope!’

She saw that there was only ten or twelve feet to go. Time

‘It’s too short!’ he cried.

to put some of that training into action. She thought of

‘Just have to try it, mate,’ she said, smiling.

Sergeant Drew Smith and the parachute team he had 244

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brought to Perivale Youth Centre one wet bank holiday.

He’d been one of her earliest crushes. This one’s for you, Drew, she thought.

Ace threw herself to the ground, rolled expertly and found herself gripped by Robin’s hands. He kissed her Chapter Ten

gratefully. Then they both looked up at the tower.

The Doctor was reaching the end of the rope. He swung in the wind, trying to get a grip on the loose masonry of the tower wall.

In the attic chamber, the cloud of energy shimmered over the globes of explosive. There was potential energy in there, it knew. Delicious energy. And any moment now...

Trevithick pulled at the banister and leant heavily over it, wheezing and spluttering. He stared into the gloom and The tower roof erupted in flame as the entire attic made out a large red sign on the far wall. Level 8. He was disintegrated. Chunks of stone and roof-slate blasted into almost there now. Just through the door and back down the the air. The whole structure tottered on its foundations.

corridor towards the control room.

The Doctor felt the heat first and a blinding light as he lost There was

a sharp pain in his leg and he reached down, his grip on the rope. Then there was terrible empty air wincing as his fingers contacted a vicious cut. The tweed around him and his senses cried out in shock, his stomach material of his trousers hung in shreds.

lurching. He hit the ground with tremendous force.

Trevithick took a deep breath and hauled himself to the Ace and Robin were by him in an instant.

top of the steps. He allowed himself a little smirk of

'Doctor!' Ace wailed, running her fingers over his satisfaction. He'd fought off that creature. Come through it blackened face.

alive. Him! A seventy-year-old man. That was something to The ruined tower crackled with flame behind them and tell his granddaughter, should he ever chance to see her lumps of stone continued to fall. Robin coughed as a blanket again.

of smoke drifted down to ground level.

He pulled open the doors and stumbled as black dots The Doctor lay sprawled on the grass, deathly still.

crowded his vision. Shaking his head, he advanced down the corridor, leaning against the wall for support. For an instant, everything went black.

No. He'd never fainted in his life. This was no time to start.

Oh but he had, hadn't he? After the window had been smashed.

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Don't think about that. Don't...

The Doctor fell back, tears springing to his eyes, and bit He had to tell them what he had seen in the lower floors.

into his lower lip.

It was too important to ignore.

‘It’s his shoulder,’ yelled Robin. ‘Look!’

The corridor walls seemed to close in on him.

Ace looked and felt suddenly sick. There was an ugly Dicky ticker, he thought to himself. No surprise at his age, lump projecting from beneath the sleeve of the Doctor’s coat.

and after the strain he’d put himself under...

‘Dislocated,’ gasped the Doctor, weeping in agony. ‘Have With a low moan, Trevithick slid to the floor, unconscious.

to put it back.’ He was panting in distress.

‘What?’ said Ace. ‘I can’t...’

‘Doctor!’

‘Do it!’ ordered the Doctor. ‘Please ... please. Can’t stand Ace pulled at the hood of the Doctor’s duffel coat in an it...’

attempt to rouse him. Robin put his ear to the Doctor’s chest He arched his back and screamed. Robin put his hands on and blinked anxiously. He frowned and moved his ear to the Doctor’s right shoulder, eliciting an immediate howl the other side.

from the prostrate Time Lord.

‘He’s got...’

‘I’ll hold it,’ panted Robin. ‘You push it back in.’

‘I know,’ said Ace quietly. ‘Two hearts.’

Ace looked down worriedly.

She knelt down and held the Doctor’s hand in hers. His

‘Please!’ hissed the Doctor between his teeth. ‘Quickly!’

face was pale and waxen, little curls of sweat-soaked hair

‘Sorry about this, Doctor,’ said Ace grimly.

plastered to his forehead.

Robin pushed his knee under the Doctor's back and Ace

'You might as well know,' she said, hopelessly. 'He's an rested her hands on the dislocated shoulder, gritting her alien and I'm from the future. We travel through Time.'

teeth as though she were feeling the pain herself. She Robin looked up from his scrutiny of the Doctor. He grasped the bones firmly and, holding her breath, slammed shrugged and smiled slightly. 'Well, you did say you them back into place.

weren't from round here.'

The Doctor emitted a stream of oaths not heard since the Ace put her hand on the Doctor's brow. 'Why won't he very darkest days of Gallifreyan history and then fell back, wake up?'

sobbing, on to the moor.

Robin sighed. 'I don't know. His heartbeat is very shallow.

'Thank you. Thank you both,' he muttered, eyelids Maybe that's normal for him...'

flickering.

Suddenly, the Doctor sat bolt upright and yelled in pain.

'Did I do good?' asked Ace eagerly. 'Blowing up the Ace sat back on her haunches in surprise, staring at the tower?'

Doctor's wide open mouth. He roared and screamed and The Doctor opened one eye painfully. 'Nothing could've howled in agony until Ace thought she'd be deafened.

been worse. It feeds off energy. You gave it a nice hors

'What is it? What is it?' she cried desperately.

d'oeuvre for the main dish.'

Ace looked crestfallen.

boy-scout jamboree, although Jill had violently vetoed The Doctor looked up and smiled. ‘But you did get us out someone’s notion of a singsong.

of there,’ he croaked. Ace grinned back.

Now they were huddled together in the pews, wrapped in

‘What d’you mean, “main dish”?’ said Robin worriedly.

the blankets they’d been requested to bring. A few children The Doctor struggled into a sitting position. ‘That thing in were dashing unconcernedly up and down the aisle.

the tower ... that Sentience ... is of incalculable age. I believe Only Mr Medcalfe, one of Crook Marsham’s oldest the Earth formed around it. It runs through space like a vein residents, stood alone, gazing out of the back window into of mineral in the rocks. It’s growing and it’s hungry.’

the misty churchyard.

Robin looked ashen faced.

George Lowcock sat down next to Jill and undid his tie. ‘I The Doctor seemed to recover with remarkable speed and feel so... useless,’ he exclaimed.

was on his feet within minutes. ‘You see,’ he said, pointing

‘I know,’ said Jill calmly, ‘but until we have a clue what’s to the ruined tower, ‘you’ve only made it stronger.’

happening we’d better stay put. I know what it can do.’

Ace and Robin looked up. The air around the blackened

‘It?’

stonework was alive with roaring energy, a cloud of Jill shrugged. ‘You know, I never believed in anything out whispering light growing by the second.

of the ordinary, supernatural... even as a child. But I've seen Ace looked across the moor and then at the Doctor. His things today...'

expression was dark and forbidding.

Lowcock sank his head on to his chest. 'Well, whatever it

'What now, Doctor?' said Ace quietly.

is, I want it out of my village. I want things back the way The Doctor glanced up at the tower and then over the they were.'

moor to the fog-shrouded telescope.

Jill put a hand on his. 'I don't think they can be, George.

'Come on,' he said. 'It's time to lay some ghosts.'

Things change. They have to.'

Jill Mason sat hugging her knees to her chin in one of the Andrew Medcalfe watched his breath steam up the cold church pews. It felt like an age since they'd closed the window. He felt safe here in the old church, lost amongst church doors and almost as long since George Lowcock had the cold shadows.

made his 'difficult' announcement. He had stuck to his idea As a boy, he had often hidden from his parents in this bit of a poisonous gas leak and the reaction hadn't been as of the building, enjoying the feel of the cool stone against his incredulous as expected, several villagers having already hands and face as he gazed out of the stained glass. He'd made their own grim discoveries.

seen a good few headstones spring up since then and knew There had been several ideas to perk everyone up, some that his own, the one he was never destined to see, was not of the residents organising things with all the gusto of a too far off. He was getting on.

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This gas scare he could have done without, especially Medcalfe

rubbed his hand against a crimson-hued pane of since his declining years had been so free of incident: calm, glass and peeked out into the frost-rimed churchyard. There unspectacular and peaceful. Medcalfe turned the word over it was. The one monument he could hardly bear to look at.

in his mind. Peace. Full. It had such a beautiful sound.

Some people said he was a dull old dog but he never AICKMAN, ROBERT, PTE

complained, never answered back. Because they didn't ATKINSON, WILLIAM, PTE

understand. Could never hope to understand.

COCKAYNE, CYRIL, PTE

Oh, he had been a hot-blooded youth like the rest of them, CLEMINSON, JOHN, PTE

a bit of a rebel even. He was going to get away from this MAYNARD, EDWARD, PTE

miserable village and see the world. China, India, Africa or SHACKLETON, GEORGE, SRG

even America, which sounded so exciting in the Conan Doyle books.

His gaze moved swiftly to the base of the broken pillar There'd even been one or two brushes with the law back where a fairly fresh wreath of poppies fluttered in the wind.

at the turn of the century. Nothing too serious of course, but WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

it had taken more than a magistrate's fine to sort out Mr Woodall's daughter when he'd got her in the family way.

The sky above the ruined monastery tower rippled like But after the Somme, he had never yearned for excitement water, great bolts of burning light shooting through the again.

clouds. There was a distant rumble of thunder followed Of all the men in Crook Marsham who had joined up (and only seconds later by a vicious fork of lightning.

almost all had gone voluntarily, poor devils), only he and The Sentience licked about the tower and slowly, almost Jack Prudhoe had returned alive.

unconsciously, began to swirl into a vortex. This time the They'd never really been friends before but after the Great thunder seemed closer, booming from horizon to horizon, War they had an unspoken bond, something no one else the accompanying lightning flared across the sky. The could penetrate. Even though neither said a word about atmosphere crackled as though alive.

their experiences, both recognised the haunted look buried A massive shock ripped through the tower and the deep at the back of the other's eyes.

ancient masonry shattered into limestone dust. Trails of Medcalfe coughed loudly and spat up a ball of phlegm light sparkled in the vortex, spiralling from a rich purple to into his grubby handkerchief. He'd caught a whiff of gas in a dense, terrifying blackness. Wind roared across the moor, the trenches and was still suffering for it.

tearing up clumps of heather and rock. The old bus shelter Now old Jack was gone too: a victim, so George Lowcock and the road sign gave little resistance, exploding in a cloud said, of this mysterious accident. Ironic that it should be gas of rotten wood. Only the TARDIS stood firm, like a watchful too.

policeman, calmly biding its time.

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The Sentience spread its nebulous fronds, gushing down he was enthusiastically received by Cooper and Holly. It from the heavens like an avenging angel. The sky boiled was better than a hundred ovations, he thought, chuckling with fire.

to himself.

It felt the blackness at its heart, the great, awful Trevithick recounted his adventures with some pride and hollowness. There had to be more.

There was still need.

then told them of his discovery in the base of the lift shaft.

Need

Cooper threw him a glance. ‘Describe it.’

Flicking a shimmering tendril, it covered the whole Trevithick sat back in his chair. ‘I can’t. It’s all lit up like a distance to the village in a fraction of a second. For a few TV studio. Too bright to make anything out. But it’s pulsing, moments, it gurgled and twisted around every house, as if it were alive. I managed to get back up the stairs to this loosening bricks and shattering roofs.

level but I think I must’ve passed out. Getting to be a bit of a Need

habit, I’m afraid.’

Then there was a tiny trace in its mind. Insistent. Powerful.

‘Well,’ said Vijay, ‘we’re delighted…’

Bountiful.

The double doors burst open at the suggestion of Robin’s Need

foot and he, the Doctor and Ace ran into the room, bringing A torrent of emotion raced through every brilliant particle a mass of wind-blown foliage with them.

of its essence and sadness overwhelmed it. Such regret.

‘Doctor! Thank God!’ exclaimed Trevithick.

Such regret.

Cooper ran a hand through her blood-stiffened hair and Regret was good. Regret was strong.

grinned broadly. ‘Good to have you back.’

Need

‘What’s the situation?’ said the Doctor quietly.

Need

Cooper gestured around desperately. The room was Suddenly, there were images too. Faces and names and clattering with data again.

voices, all perfectly clear and unsullied. Without the

‘It’s coming from under the ground, not space,’ said Holly, slightest hesitation, the Sentience moved in for the kill.

triumphantly.

Vijay found Trevithick slumped in the corridor just The Doctor blinked. ‘Yes. Yes, that would make sense.’

outside the control room. He appeared to be asleep through Trevithick stepped forward. ‘Doctor, I’ve seen it. Down sheer exhaustion, his empty revolver gripped tightly in one there. You wouldn’t believe it. All the lower levels, full of hand.

light and.. .and...’ He stammered and shook his head.

Vijay was so delighted to find the old man alive that he

‘I’ve spoken to it,’ said the Doctor gravely.

kissed him, an action which roused Trevithick faster than

‘You’ve what?’ cried Vijay.

any smelling salts.

‘I don’t know what it is. I don’t even know if it’s alive in Hooking one of Trevithick’s arms around him, Vijay any sense we understand. It’s like a virus. Or a vampire.

carried the battle-weary actor into the control room where Feeding off energy.’

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Ace shot a look at the shattered window. ‘What happened

‘Exactly.’ The Doctor rose from his chair. ‘And the here?’

stronger your belief in it, the more powerful it becomes until Vijay smiled. ‘You wouldn’t like to know.’

you haven’t the will to deny it. And then it consumes you.’

Robin was also by the window, gazing at the boiling sky.

Robin thought of Betty. What had she seen? What was the

‘Doctor, I think you should see this.’

dreadful death he had condemned her to?

The Doctor appraised the violent heavens with one look

‘What can we do?’ he said at last.

and then turned back. ‘We’re running out of time. It’s

‘We have to fight it at source,’ declared the Doctor firmly.

spreading all over the moor.’

He turned to Trevithick. ‘Edmund, you said something

‘But what is it?’ insisted Cooper.

about the lower levels...’

‘I’ve told you, I don’t know!’ bellowed the Doctor, angrily.

‘There’s no need, Doctor,’ cried Vijay. ‘I think we’ve

‘I can’t have an answer for everything.’

found a more direct route downwards.’ The Doctor frowned.

Oh, that’s a good one, thought Ace.

The Doctor sat down. ‘It’s incredibly ancient. Older than Andrew Medcalfe jerked back from the window in the Earth itself. It runs through the planet.’

surprise. There was someone standing by the war memorial,

‘Like the letters in Blackpool rock?’ said Trevithick their face in deep

shadow.

brightly.

He almost turned to call Lowcock. Everyone was The Doctor glared at him. ‘If you like.’

supposed to be inside the church. For their own good. He Cooper looked at the Doctor earnestly. ‘But all these almost turned.

incidents, ghosts…’

But then the figure raised its face and gazed directly into The Doctor’s voice was husky and exhausted. ‘My guess Medcalfe’s bleary old eyes.

is that, powerful as it is, it can’t feed directly. It needs Need

something to latch on to, to give it time to feed.’

The young man was wearing a knee-length trenchcoat

‘Memory?’ said Vijay.

and high boots. His hair and skin were fair, almost radiant, The Doctor nodded. ‘For the most part. Strong flushed with youthful vigour. He smiled warmly.

associations. Regrets. Desires. They’re formidable emotions.

‘John?’ whispered Medcalfe.

Think how one little thing can stir up a flood of nostalgia in John Cleminson.

all of us.’ He glanced down. ‘All of us.’

‘Like that French chap and his teacake!’ announced Need

Trevithick triumphantly.

Need

‘So the power of our emotion, our memory, summoned Need

these ghosts into being?’ whispered Holly.

The Sentience hissed with delight. Perfect.

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‘John?’ croaked Medcalfe in disbelief.

Need

His mind raced, unbidden, through the other names on The Sentience relished Lowcock’s contact and grew the memorial. So many friends.

stronger still.

Medcalfe backed away. There were others now, appearing Suddenly, there were faces crowding the window, out of the mist in a staggered line. Some he recognised. Billy pressing their features against the cold panes and grinning.

Atkinson with his shiny black moustache. Cyril Cockayne, Grinning.

his arm in a sling just as it had been the day the shell wiped One of the gas-masked figures pushed itself to the fore him off the face of the Earth.

and Medcalfe saw his own face reflected in the blank glass Others were anonymous behind gas masks, strutting sockets. He screamed.

remorselessly across the graveyard like hideous blind pigs.

‘Not this time!’ insisted the Doctor.

‘But why?’ cried Ace plaintively.

The Doctor looked about evasively. Cooper was staying behind to monitor things on the surface. Holly, Vijay and Trevithick, who wouldn’t hear of being left out of the adventure, had elected to accompany him below ground.

But Ace was not to come.

‘You’re...’ The Doctor looked up but managed to avoid Ace’s eyes. ‘You’re too important.’

Ace frowned but then decided this was a rare compliment, something not to be sniffed at. She smiled warmly.

‘OK. No tantrums. You win, Doctor.’

He touched her arm and smiled thinly.

‘Is it really that bad?’ said Ace.

The Doctor didn’t reply. Ace sighed. There were deep Medcalfe felt someone by him and turned in fear. It was shadows under his eyes. He looked fit to drop. Robin put George Lowcock.

his arm around Ace and the Doctor clapped a hand on the The policeman stood and stared at the spectres through boy’s shoulder. ‘Look after her,’ he whispered.

the frost-covered window. He didn’t recognise a single one, Ace watched the party leave through the double doors, but he believed in them.

shrinking back as another blast of wind from the moor He believes

flooded into the station.

Need

It was as if he didn’t expect to come back.

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The moor was like a battleground, a fierce gale whipping The Doctor sniffed. There was a faint but noticeable odour and lashing through the heather. The Doctor pulled up the of decay.

hood of his coat and wrapped his scarf over his mouth as he,

‘It’s the same,’ said Trevithick in a sepulchral whisper.

Trevithick, Vijay and Holly struggled towards the cave Holly moved off into the darkness. ‘It’s stronger further entrance.

down.’

‘There, Doctor!’ called Vijay, his face hidden by the bulk The Doctor pointed his torch before them and led the way.

of his parka.

Trevithick looked back as they descended deeper into the The Doctor ran towards the cave mouth which the tunnel, the rain-lashed entrance now a diminishing half subsidence had uncovered, plunged his hand into his circle of grey light.

pocket and produced his torch.

Ace stapled the last sheet of polythene across the

‘Are you going to try and reason with it?’ shouted shattered window and watched the rain drum against it.

Trevithick above the noise of the wind.

Even through the distortion of the plastic she could see the The Doctor scowled and didn’t reply. Instead, he swept fantastic display lighting up the sky. If she hadn’t known the torch-beam around the cave, the beam creating a broad how sinister were its implications, she would have yellow cone of light in the fog.

marvelled at its beauty. It was as if the oceans had been

‘Man made,’ he said softly. ‘Well done, Vijay.’

drawn up into the clouds, torrents of light creating a

‘But if this is the quarry, Doctor, what’s made it show up?

magnificent effulgence against the pale December sun.

Why has the ground...’

Cooper had given up even attempting to make sense of The Doctor looked Vijay in the eye, crinkling his face the data overwhelming her computers. She sat rubbing her against the onslaught of the elements. ‘This thing has come temples as sheaves of paper pooled around her shoes.

fully to life, probably for the first time, and it’s growing.

She glanced up as lightning spat across the sky, Expanding under the ground. That’s what Edmund must illuminating the whole room. Robin caught her eye and have seen in the lower levels of the station: a tremendous smiled.

build up of energy. It’s shaking off its earthly shackles and

‘Had enough?’ he said.

this is the result.’ He gestured around at the scorched,

‘Now I know it’s not from space,’ she gestured at the disrupted ground.

steady pulse of data, ‘it’s not such a burning issue. I was Trevithick stepped forward. ‘Well, let’s see where it goes, giving myself a heart attack trying to make sense of it. Turns shall we?’

out to be just nonsense. This “thing” below us flooding the The cave floor began to dip almost immediately, leading systems.’

into a steep tunnel. The rock walls glistened with moisture.

Robin sensed her helplessness and felt sorry for her. It Holly wrinkled her nose. ‘Can you smell that?’

couldn’t be easy having so many of one’s certainties turned on their heads like that. He looked at the chattering consoles 260

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with interest and decided to engage Cooper in conversation, Ace grinned. ‘The Doctor taught me everything I know.’

preferably on a topic she was expert at. Almost guaranteed

‘Anyway, they’re very rare,’ Cooper continued. ‘One of to perk her up.

the reasons we’re here is to look for their remains. We call

‘And what’s that?’

them pulsars. A friend of Holly’s discovered the first one in He pointed to the small bank of monitors to Cooper’s left.

February.’

She smirked. ‘That, son, is the only thing we can get a fix on Ace sat down next to Robin, deciding to continue at the moment. Our own private nova.’

privately with her impressive monologue. ‘The iron core Robin chewed his thumb, struggling to recall his half-collapses and becomes so dense that the, that the...’

heard science lessons. ‘And that’s an exploding star, right?’

‘Atomic nuclei,’ called Cooper, without looking up. Ace Cooper nodded. ‘Mmm.’

smiled ruefully at Robin. “Those, anyway, are crushed Robin held up his hand and looked into space together. It spins on its axis and produces pulses which they thoughtfully. ‘So what’s the difference between that and a -

can detect with the telescope.’

what d’you call it - super nova?’

Robin grinned at her. ‘Right.’

Ace saw her chance. This was going to sound impressive.

‘Anything else you’d like to know?’ said Ace chirpily.

‘A supernova is...’ she hesitated, remembering one of the

‘Yes. How long you’ll be staying around.’

Doctor’s short but instructive lectures, ‘a supernova is an Ace’s face fell. She’d been expecting this moment. ‘Well...’

old star. Its centre gets hotter and hotter till it tries to burn Robin looked at her. ‘You said the Doctor wants to stop heavier elements...’

travelling. Settle down. Is he likely to do that here?’

‘Helium, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, silicon...’ added Ace shook her head. ‘He’s got universes to choose from.’

Cooper helpfully.

‘Any time, any place, any where. He’s not called Doctor Ace cast her eyes upwards, praying she wouldn’t forget.

Martini, is he?’

‘And finally iron,’ she said triumphantly.

Ace smiled sadly. ‘Anyway, I doubt he’ll choose

‘So?’ Robin shrugged.

Yorkshire in the late sixties.’

‘When the centre of a star is made of iron,’ said Cooper Robin shifted uncomfortably. She knew so much that he with mock gravity, ‘it has an energy crisis, because the wanted to know.

thermonuclear fusion of iron absorbs energy instead of

‘Tell me about the future, Ace. Will things be OK?’

releasing it.’

Ace frowned. ‘I can’t tell you that. It’s not fair. You’d be Ace knew that bit and was a little annoyed she hadn’t expecting things, or dreading them.’

been allowed to say so. ‘Anyway,’ she put in, before Cooper Robin

took her hand. ‘Well, there is one way of making could steal any more of her thunder, ‘the star collapses like sure I just take things as they come.’

a house of cards and boom!’

Cooper smiled. ‘You’re remarkably well informed.’

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Ace looked at his serious expression, his thick black hair,

‘No. It’s me.’ Ace’s voice was indistinct through the hiss brilliant eyes and oh-so-delicious lips. ‘Stay with me,’ he of static. ‘Dr Cooper’s monitoring a slow build-up. The said at last.

pulse is getting stronger. I think it’s on its way. Over.’

‘Right. Thank you. Over and...’

Holly, Vijay and Trevithick had hung back a little whilst

‘Doctor?’

the Doctor went ahead with his torch. After a time, he

‘Yes?’

returned, a look of puzzlement on his face.

There was a long pause. ‘Nothing. Take care. Over and

‘Come on. It’s all right.’

out.’

They followed him down the narrow tunnel until they Vijay’s eyes widened in fear. ‘Let’s get out of here.’

emerged in a large cavern, its black rock walls glistening

‘No,’ muttered the Doctor. ‘We came here to confront it with moisture.

Rain from the drenched moor above trickled and that's what we must do.'

down through the roof.

Trevithick looked about uneasily in the darkness. 'I say, Trevithick chose a boulder and sat down, tired by his gone awfully quiet, hasn't it?'

exertions. The Doctor shone the torch around the cavern, They all exchanged glances. A thick hush had descended picking out chunks of stone upon which the mark of human on the cavern. Even the steady drip of water from the interference was obvious.

surface appeared to have ceased.

'The quarry,' said the Doctor. 'Smothered by soil over Holly shivered. 'It's so cold,' she said wonderingly.

thousands of years.'

The Doctor was conscious of it too. 'Temperature drop.

Holly picked up a small figure, crudely carved out of Like a cold spot in a haunted house.'

limestone. There were others dotted about the ground, some

'Over there!' Vijay pointed to the far wall of the cavern in almost perfect, others with only rudimentary work on them.

which a dark fissure was visible. As they watched, the wall

'It's like Easter Island,' she breathed.

began to glow, almost as though a gateway were opening to

'What do you think we'll find here, Doctor?' said Vijay.

the outside. There was a deep, thunderous rumble and tiny The Doctor was examining the walls. 'I don't know. I spheres of light began to split off and dance about in the suppose I half expected it to be here waiting for us.'

cold air, colliding off the walls to coalesce above their heads.

'But the sky,' said Trevithick. 'All that activity. Surely it's The Doctor

gazed up in awe. The light continued to sparkle, on the surface now.’

shifting colours from gold to a brilliant cobalt blue.

‘No,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m convinced it’s just sending out

‘It’s so beautiful,’ whispered Holly.

feelers. The main body is still here. This has to be it.’

‘The song of the Siren,’ said the Doctor cryptically.

There was a dull crackle from his pocket and he swiftly The cavern was suddenly alive with blinding light.

removed the walkie-talkie.

Trevithick shielded his eyes against the painful glare, his

‘Dr Cooper?’

brows knitting together. The Doctor peeked through his

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fingers. ‘So strong,’ he breathed. Waves of heat shimmered Need

towards them.

The Sentience throbbed with delight.

‘Clear your minds!’ called the Doctor. ‘It’s the only way to

‘Let it go,’ cried the Doctor. ‘You can’t bring him back.’

remain safe.’

‘Hol,’ pleaded Vijay. ‘Let it go.’ He gazed into her Holly had seen this display before, the hypnotic light frightened eyes. ‘Need me.’

drenching her brain. The thought came before she could The Sentience rippled and grew more substantial, ethereal even acknowledge it and then refused to go away, like the light glancing off every feature. It opened its mouth, rushing refrain of some annoyingly

catchy tune. She shook her head through Holly's memory and piecing together fragments of and looked away from the burning gold light.

Time, moments of experience. Constructing a voice.

Vijay caught hold of her arms and shook her. 'Holly?

'Holly,' it stammered.

What is it?'

Holly froze. The voice was strange, indistinct, as though She snapped shut her eyes and fought to wipe the image heard underwater. But it was James.

from her brain.

'Holly.' The voice was already stronger, almost

'Can't! Can't do it!' she whimpered, grasping her temples, commanding. The Sentience beckoned.

her face screwed up in agony.

Trevithick moved forward. The Doctor held him back.

'Look!' It was Trevithick's voice, hushed in awe. The

'We can all see it, Edmund. It knows we believe too. We're Doctor and Vijay turned. Holly ran to the wall and buried all in danger.'

her head in her hands. Out of the flood of light, a man was Vijay grabbed Holly by the shoulders. 'Holly! For Christ's emerging, tall and smiling, his arms open in welcome. His sake! Think of us. Think of me. James is dead. D'you skin shone beautifully, patches of golden light woven understand?'

together to form the image.

Holly wriggled in his grip, shaking her head in confusion.

The Sentience could taste the strength of Holly's memory.

Holly...

Part of it had sensed her presence, shooting out tendrils Holly...

from its massive core to find and isolate her.

The voice was inside her head now, quiet and calm. Peace There was resistance too, but that would pass. Somewhere, descended on her mind and suddenly everything became in the darkest corners of her mind, Holly wanted to believe.

clear to her. It was so easy. So obvious.

She turned from the wall.

Holly...

'James!' she screamed, gagging with emotion.

She turned to look at Vijay and nodded. 'It's OK. I'm all

'It isn't real, Holly!' bellowed the Doctor above the rising right.'

noise. 'The more you believe...'

Vijay's grip on her arm loosened. In an instant, she was

'I need him. I still need him,' she sobbed.

sprinting across the cavern.

Need

'James!' she yelled, tears flooding her eyes.

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'Holly, no!' Vijay pelted after her.

the worst thing he could have done? The belief of the The Sentience grinned broadly. Holly jerked to a stop dreaming mind was so much stronger. So much sweeter...

directly before it. She extended a shaking hand. James's It had almost consumed her before whilst she slept, like smile faded a little. 'It's been so long,' he whispered. His the woman in the village, but this

time there would be no voice was as soothing as the babble of clear, mountain water.

escape.

‘James.’ Holly felt her grief easing away moment by The Sentience entered Holly’s willing mind and began to moment, a healing joy washing through her mind. ‘I love gorge itself on her life force.

you!’

‘Vijay!’ Trevithick pointed down at Holly’s inert body and

‘Kiss me,’ instructed James, his red lips alive with pixels felt his blood run cold.

of light.

Vijay dashed across to Holly and lifted her in his arms. A Vijay caught hold of Holly’s hair and swung her round.

tide of light was drifting over her skin in sweeping waves.

‘No!’ he screeched. Holly looked at him with a strange

‘No, no!’ Vijay sobbed angrily, running his fingers hatred in her eyes and he felt his heart sink. Then, gritting through Holly’s hair and across her face.

his teeth, Vijay brought round his fist and punched Holly He could see through her skin now, as the Sentience into unconsciousness. She crumpled and fell to the rocky burrowed through her flesh. Fragments of bone shattered floor.

and burned before his eyes.

The Sentience billowed like a sail, regarding the three men Vijay dropped her and wept into his hands, scarcely below it with detached interest.

daring to watch the appalling sight before him.

‘Leave us,’ hissed the Doctor. ‘Why can’t you leave us The Sentience ripped and pummeled through Holly, alone?’

draining every morsel of her energy. A great wash of light

‘Need!’ thundered the Sentience, pillars of fire shooting exploded, around her.

from its outstretched arms.

For a moment, she shone with magnesium brightness and It grew suddenly larger, patterns of gold filigree sparkling then the glare faded. There was nothing left behind.

across its eyes as it turned to observe Holly where she lay.

‘No.’ Vijay sank to his knees. Trevithick put his arm There was a huge inrush of air, it closed its eyes and, in an around the young man’s shoulder and shot an anxious look instant, was gone.

at the Doctor who was struggling to his feet. ‘Let’s go, for Vijay looked about desperately. ‘Doctor? What’s heaven’s sake.’

happened to it?’

The Doctor was already making for the tunnel. ‘It’s so The Doctor shook his head wearily.

strong,’ he said again. ‘Not even a body left this time. I must... I must think.’

The Sentience squirmed and gushed with pleasure. Didn’t A huge sigh, almost a sob, was wrenched from his chest.

he realise that sending the female into unconsciousness was 268

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Trevithick pulled Vijay to his feet. The young man was The beamed roof shook and plaster cascaded down on to shaking his head silently, tears running down his cheeks.

the frightened survivors.

He had been too weak, then, after all. Unable to fight Outside, the Sentience lashed about the church gables like against a dead man. Now she was gone.

a kraken attached to a storm-tossed ship. Tendrils of golden The Doctor strode down the tunnel, scarcely bothering light ranged through the graveyard, lapping at tombstones.

about the rocks into which his shins slammed. Trevithick There was a deafening roar as the portion of its hobbled behind, helping Vijay as best he could.

consciousness which had been below ground blasted back

‘What are we going to do?’ cried Trevithick to the little through the village like a typhoon, flattening houses in its figure ahead of him. The Doctor said nothing. In fact, path.

Trevithick thought he might not have heard until the Doctor The Sentience felt almost whole again and flexed itself, the stopped abruptly just in sight of the tunnel entrance.

energy infusion from Holly gushing through it. Soon it Trevithick wheezed and let Vijay slide to the ground.

would be strong enough to summon its entire self from

‘Doctor, I said...’

below.

He stopped, conscious of the Doctor’s back turned But still there was need. There was always need.

towards him. ‘What is it?’ he asked, turning to look out into It scanned the minds of those gathered in the church the open air.

below and felt good. There were rich pickings to be had.

The light was still a dismal grey, wind and rain lashing The Sentience prodded and encouraged every fugitive down on to the moor, and lashing also on to three of memory.

Trevithick’s monsters; their obscene heads twisting and Believe

clicking in pleasure...

The soldier in the church promised most. He was old and steeped in Time, like the other it had encountered in the Lowcock and Medcalfe had jammed over a dozen pews monastery.

against the window. The figures outside continued to press But was there yet more?

against the glass and Medcalfe kept a weather eye on their activity.

The Sentience scanned experimentally and picked up a Jill had managed to keep the villagers calm, using an trace from Trevithick's mind. He had defeated it once...

authoritative voice of which she didn't know she was Instantly, the Sentience propelled a tendril to the tunnel capable. She did know, however, that, sooner or later, faces entrance, assuming the familiar image of Trevithick's would begin to appear at every window. And when they monsters.

did... Well, they would cross that bridge when they came to The Doctor stepped back from the entrance. 'Impasse,' he it.

said under his breath.

Vijay looked up from the ground. 'No. No more. Please.'

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Trevithick regarded the creatures with tired old eyes. He The Doctor took his hand and looked down at the ground.

had given them a good run for their money.

Vijay scrambled to his feet. 'Mr Trevithick! Wait!'

The Doctor grasped his arms. 'Don't remember them,

'Use the chance I'm giving you, my boys,' called the old Edmund! Don't you see that they can have no existence man. 'And don't look back. Never look back.' With that, he without you?'

ran out into the fog.

Trevithick closed his eyes and concentrated, but the For a moment, he faced the three creatures, the rain images became stronger not

weaker. In his mind, he was soaking his hair. He looked at them steadily, his eyes steely shoulder to shoulder with young Jimmy Reynolds, fending and thoughtful.

off the razor-sharp claws as they ripped through the walls.

Then he launched himself at the central creature, grabbing And there was Margaret, his dear wife, standing just off the its thick neck with both hands. The other two were upon set as the cameras rushed in for the close-up. Little Paula him immediately, their vicious claws flailing at his skin.

had been so frightened of the creatures that he'd arranged Trevithick managed to rain several good blows on to the for one to unmask itself in front of her.

creature's eye before he felt a strange numbness rising

'You see, my dear,' he had said, holding her in his arms, through him. Light began to sparkle under his skin and he

'just a fella in a costume.'

felt unconsciousness overwhelming him.

But now she was gone. Margaret too. And he was just an Believe

old man with nothing but memories left to him...

Believe

'Edmund?' The Doctor touched his hand.

With one last effort, he flung his arms around the Trevithick opened his eyes and smiled. 'I'm an old fool, creature's head and fell with it on to the moor, kicking his Doctor. Never been a real hero. Not the way people thought boots into its brittle eyes.

I was.'

The Doctor grabbed Vijay by the scruff of the neck and The rain hissed down. Trevithick looked at the silent, dragged him outside. Then they sprinted across the ground waiting creatures.

towards the telescope, trying to ignore Trevithick's agonised

'They're a part of me. I can't be rid of them, hard as I try.

screams as he twisted and melded into the beasts.

I'm the only one who can get you out of here.'

They didn't look back, even when they reached the

'There must be another way, Edmund,' cried the Doctor, double doors.

his voice hoarse with despair.

The Doctor slammed and bolted both doors and, turning,

'Not this time, Doctor. No cliffhanger with a miraculous put out his hand to enter the control room. Vijay stopped escape. It's time for Nightshade to do his bit.'

him and shook him desperately. 'Why do people have to The old man's wrinkled face creased into a sad smile, his keep dying?'

eyes misting over. He held out his hand.

The Doctor looked at him grimly, then pushed open the

'Goodbye, old fellow.'

interior door.

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A gas-masked soldier thrust his face at the glass and the snoutlike filter crashed through.

There was a strangled cry from a woman crouched by the altar and Jill whirled around. Just as she'd feared, there Chapter Eelven

were dark shapes hovering outside the other windows, their shadows lurching against the glass.

At once, another gas-masked soldier smashed through, his breathing hoarse and terrifying.

Lowcock glanced up at the vaulted ceiling and his heart leaped. He

threw himself on to a pew and began wrestling with a mouldering banner which projected over the aisle.

The church shuddered again as the Sentience heaved itself He succeeded in prising the lance out of its socket and together, sliding and thrashing about the eves with tottered back to floor level, brandishing the faded colours of Trevithick's energy within it.

some forgotten Yorkshire regiment.

The dead figures pressed to the window had redoubled The soldier stood on the wide sill of the shattered window, their efforts and Medcalfe picked up a heavy brass candle gazing impassively around him. There were people snuffer with which to defend himself.

screaming now and further ghostly figures attempting to A pane of ruby-coloured glass shattered and John force their way inside.

Cleminson's pale hand pushed its way through.

Lowcock sprinted down the aisle, holding the lance like a Lowcock watched Cleminson's wrist scrape against the pole-vaulter, and clambered over a row of broken pews broken glass and wondered why it didn't bleed.

towards the window. He rammed the lance into the Instantly, the cold flesh was bright with blood.

soldier's neck and the apparition fell with an agonised cry, It was necessary to maintain the illusion. To keep them blood fountaining from the wound.

believing.

Lowcock crouched down and ripped off the gas mask. His Need

spine froze as he took in the soldier's perfectly blank face: a Need

smooth, round head without a single feature.

'Who are they?' cried Jill, throwing her arms around a

'George! The door!' Jill called.

couple of terrified children.

Lowcock spun round. The big oak doors were beginning Medcalfe

tried to reply but his throat was bone dry.

to shake as something battered at them from the outside.

Cleminson's fingers began to pull at the leadwork.

Lowcock bit his lip. 'Albert, Harry, Alan,' he cried rapidly.

Lowcock looked about the church for weapons. There

'Get those lances down.' He gestured at the remaining were none visible.

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banners projecting from the walls. 'And push the pews

'No one did ask,' he said bitterly. 'I came here to get away against the doors. Quickly!'

from this kind of...' His voice trailed off hopelessly. 'There's The villagers were mobilised now, ramming anything no rest for me. I got involved. Yet again.'

they could find against the windows and doors.

Cooper rubbed her eyes. 'What I don't understand is why

'It's no good,' whimpered Medcalfe. 'They'll be in any it - whatever it is - has suddenly become active. I mean, if minute. Oh, God!'

what you said is right, it's been here millions of years.'

Lowcock began to move towards the doors but stopped as The Doctor shrugged. 'I don't think it was strong enough.

his shoes clanged on a floor tile. He looked down. The tile Those incidents in the past. The Civil War ghosts. Things had a brass ring set into it.

before that, even. It must've detected them and made what Lowcock

rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

it could of the situation without being fully aware. Like a hibernating animal turning over in its sleep. For some The Doctor and Vijay almost fell into the control room.

reason, it's never realised its full potential. Perhaps because Ace ran to them.

this has always been such an underpopulated place.'

'Doctor? Are you all right? What happened?' Cooper

'No food,' said Ace gravely.

looked across from the buzzing consoles anxiously.

The Doctor nodded, gazing around the room with red-

'Vijay? Where's ...?' Vijay looked at her steadily. Cooper rimmed eyes. 'Or at least, not sufficient to give it a critical felt her throat constrict.

mass...'

'Oh no.'

Cooper whistled slowly. 'Until they built this place on top

'And the old bloke too?' said Robin incredulously.

of it!'

Vijay nodded. 'It's because of him that we got back.'

'Very probably, yes. All that activity, followed by huge Ace looked at the Doctor. 'What were you trying to do?'

amounts of electricity, must've acted as a lure. It started He shook his head hopelessly. 'I thought I could reason sending out feelers, gauging the potential energy in the with it. I'd already spoken to it once. I thought I might find village population. So many people with fond memories...'

out how to stop it.'

Ace shuddered. 'It's horrible.'

‘And did you?’ asked Ace.

‘Just trying to survive,’ said Vijay quietly. ‘Like all the rest The Doctor didn’t look up. ‘I’ve failed. It’s simply grown of us.’

more powerful.’

Ace felt Robin’s hand slip into hers and was glad of it.

Cooper crossed the room and sat down next to him.

‘What can we do then?’

‘Don’t blame yourself, Doctor. You’ve done your best. No The Doctor rested his head on his hand and sighed. ‘I one could ask for more.’

don’t know any more. I can’t think. I just can’t...’

His voice broke into a sob and Ace ran to him, cradling his slight frame in her arms.

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‘It’s OK, Doctor. Come on. You’ll be fine. You always are.’

empty front room. He looked around rapidly, almost as if He looked at her but once again his eyes were focused he could detect movement in the atmosphere itself.

somewhere far distant.

‘Ace!’ he called.

‘I saw Susan,’ he whispered. ‘It knew. It knew everything The Doctor looked up from his brooding and noticed his I’d been feeling. Every pain. Every regret.’

companion. She was gripping the arms of her chair, her Ace stroked his hair. ‘Come on, Doctor. You’ve got to help brow furrowed in concentration.

us. You've got to give us some ideas.'

'Ace? What're you doing?' the Doctor cried, getting to his

'I don't know what to do, Ace! Not this time...'

feet.

Ace looked down sadly at her friend. She'd never known

'You taught me so much, Doctor,' she shouted, eyes him to be indecisive. Even when he was wrong, he would at clamped shut. 'Taught me to face my fears, not run away least put his all into it. Now he sat like a broken man, his from them. Remember Gabriel Chase?'

spirit crushed by the grief and emotion of a lifetime.

'No, Ace! You don't know what you're doing. It'll destroy Robin tugged at her sleeve and led her to one side. 'He's you!'

lost it, Ace. Can't you see? We can't wait for him to get us The Doctor hared across the room and stood by her, out of this. It's up to us. If we can get out of the village...'

hands shaking.

'We can do what?' spat Ace, angrily. 'Call the police? The

'I have to know if you've succeeded, Doctor. That we've army? Look, Robin, we haven't a clue how to even begin to both come through it together. It's the only way to make fight this thing. Besides...'

you see. You're the only hope we've got of destroying this

'Besides?'

bloody thing!'

'I have to believe in the Doctor. Otherwise there's no point

'No! Ace!'

in going on.'

The Doctor reached out a hand to touch her but Robin lowered his eyes, defeated.

immediately swung round as light began to dance through Ace looked around the control room.

the air.

Vijay was sitting in a chair, hugging himself, Cooper with Ace smiled to herself. She had to be strong. Concentrate.

a consoling hand on his shoulder. The Doctor sat close by, Remember. She let distant images swim before her mind's head bent, eyes closed.

eye.

There'll be no better time, thought Ace. And this was the Yes, that would do...

only way to prove to herself it was true.

She was small. Perhaps five or six. The sun was hot and She picked a chair some distance away from the others very high in the cloudless sky. There was sea and the and closed her eyes.

reassuring tumble of the frothy waves. White horses, her Robin noticed it first, a chill spreading through the air and mum always called them. Mum...

a pungent smell which reminded him of Dr Shearsmith's

'Dory?'

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Her mother was calling for her now. Across that stretch of Lowcock shoved a young boy down the crypt steps and yellow sand on a faraway summer's day. And calling across looked around anxiously. There was no one left to come. No the years...

one except ...

Ace could feel gritty sand between her toes, taste warm Andrew Medcalfe was backing away from the window, a lemonade and tomato

and egg sandwiches. Feel her cheeks fair-haired man in a trenchcoat advancing down the aisle burn as she was forced to change into her little swimming towards him.

costume without the camouflage of the beach towel. Feel the

'Andrew!' bellowed Lowcock. 'Get down here!'

crack of her mum's hand across her backside when she'd Medcalfe stumbled and almost fell over his own feet. He pee'd in the car on the way home...

looked over his shoulder, panic-stricken, as Lowcock

'Mum?'

scrambled out of the crypt.

'Dory?'

'Get away from me, John!' shrieked the old soldier.

The voice came to her like a rolling wave, breaking on the

'You're dead. You can't be here!'

bank of her subconscious.

'But I am here,' purred the fair-haired apparition. 'Just an old friend coming back to see you. It's been so long...'

A burning, delicious yearning swept through the Lowcock swivelled his eyes and fastened his gaze on the Sentience and it rippled with pleasure. There was a radiant church's eagle lectern. With a cry, he stormed up the aisle contact somewhere out on the moor.

and lifted it into the air.

It paused in its attack on the church and sent a portion of Cleminson's ghost marched relentlessly towards Medcalfe itself shooting towards the telescope.

and the old man fell to the floor, his knees cracking off the floor tiles.

Lowcock stood on the threshold of the open vault. The

'Please, John. Leave me alone.'

church had become unnaturally quiet, the ghostly soldiers

‘You were lucky that day, Andrew,’ hissed the apparition, falling back from their assault and stumbling about as its voice disintegrating into a low rustle. ‘Some of us weren’t though struck blind.

so fortunate. I’ve come back for the future they stole from Lowcock lost no time. ‘Everyone! Down into the crypt.

me.’

Quickly!’

He extended a khaki-clad arm and grasped Medcalfe’s He gestured feverishly with his hands and ushered the chin in his pale hand. ‘Now, old man,’ Cleminson breathed.

villagers through the floor and into the vault. If they were Lowcock sprang up behind the figure and swung the lucky, whatever was directing the attack wouldn’t know massive lectern with every shred of his strength. The great what had happened to them.

brass eagle slammed into Cleminson’s head and took it off in one movement. There was an appalling crack of splintering bone and the head thudded into the pews.

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Cleminson’s body stood for some seconds like a side-

‘It’s OK, Doctor.’ She stood up. ‘I’m fine,’ she repeated, show dummy and then toppled to the floor. Medcalfe stared turning to address the apparition. ‘It’s you that’s in trouble.’

at it in horror.

Audrey smiled. ‘Come on, Dory. Don’t play games. We’re

‘George...’ he began.

going to the school today to see the Head about that nasty Lowcock

grabbed his arm. ‘No time. Come on.’

boy Chad Boyle.’

He thrust him down the stairs into the crypt and followed Ace half smiled. It had done its homework. ‘You’re not immediately after, slamming shut the floor plate with a my mother,’ she said quietly. ‘Whatever you are, you’re not resounding boom.

her. You’re not real and I’m not afraid of you. I deny your Ace had formed a picture of her mother now, a composite reality. You have no claim on me! ‘

of every Christmas morning, summer holiday, every blazing The Sentience within Audrey grew taller, glaring down at row. How many times had that face burned itself into her Ace, its face darkening in fury.

sleeping mind. She had hated it. Hated it.

‘You cannot...’

The Doctor was standing with his back to the wall, staring The voice began to tremble a little, breaking up into a soft up at the auroral display which crackled through the air.

rustling sound.

Cooper moved behind the consoles in disbelief. ‘Look!

‘You cannot...’

Can you see...?’

Need

She jammed her fingers into her mouth as a figure Need

shimmered into view, hovering a few feet from where Ace The Sentience felt the great hollowness returning. There was sitting.

was nothing for it here.

It was a pretty, middle-aged woman, her face wreathed in

‘Get out! Get out of here!’ shouted Ace.

smiles.

Audrey's image began to disintegrate; glittering particles

'Hello, Dory, love. Where on earth have you been? I was swirled into a vortex around it.

worried sick.'

Ace picked up a sheaf of papers and hurled them at the Ace opened her eyes and jumped, shocked at the apparition.

perfection of the apparition.

'Get out!'

The Sentience had found the image of Audrey easy to The papers fluttered to the floor. When they settled, the assume. There was much bile in the girl's memory, much Sentience had gone.

resentment. It shivered inside the golden particles of the

'Ace!' Robin ran to her and flung his arms around her. She woman's body, light bleeding from every pore.

grinned broadly and kissed him.

'I'm fine,' said Ace, carefully.

'Don't worry. I knew what I was doing,' she lied.

'Ace,' said the Doctor, concernedly.

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Ace turned to the Doctor who was staring at her in Need

disbelief. 'I can face my past, Doctor. Now, what about There was still energy to be had, however.

you?'

It would simply concentrate its efforts on the church.

The Doctor continued to stare and then ran across the Drain those creatures dry.

room to Cooper, his hands flapping in agitation. ‘Show me Then came another contact. Begging it to stay, demanding your nova! Show me!’

it to stay. A strong contact, no... an unprecedented contact. It Cooper tapped some figures into the console. The was the creature from the monastery again! And this time, Doctor’s eyes flicked down the screen. He drummed his he wasn’t shielding himself.

fingers against the console and ran a hand through his hair.

There was so much energy there, such a wealth of Ace felt a bit deflated. A bit of recognition wouldn’t do experience - almost as if he had lived several lives.

any harm, she thought.

The Sentience pulsed an urgent signal and finally pulled The Doctor turned full around and his face was suffused free of its earthly prison. Light blasted from beneath the with joy.

moor, sending tons of soil shooting into the heavens.

The bulk of the Sentience joined with the portion wrapped Lowcock held his breath. The crypt was completely dark around the church eves and scorched across the moor, but he felt a little cheered by the close proximity of his coagulating into a vast, glorious cloud around the dish of fellow villagers. Several had pressed themselves between the telescope.

ancient tombs, as if trying to vanish into the walls themselves.

‘At your mark, Doctor,’ said Cooper coolly.

Above them, the stone floor echoed with the sound of The Doctor nodded and shut his eyes. Ace had shown him footsteps.

the way. If he could only manage it half as well as she...

Lowcock crossed his fingers.

Memories flooded his mind.

Please, please, please...

That first visit to Revolutionary France. Times before that.

Jill Mason grasped his hand. He could hear her frightened He and Susan travelling alone in the TARDIS, or the Ship as breathing fluttering in his ear.

he had liked to call it then.

The footsteps came closer.

Fleeing through that terrifying forest to the plain where The Sentience was on the point of withdrawing from the the TARDIS stood. The months in China with that Venetian moor and it boiled and swirled in the atmosphere, traveller. Slowly dying from the deadly radiation of the struggling to understand its failure. No life form had ever planet Skaro. And it was Susan who had gone off into the had the will to resist it before. The lure of the past was jungle to save them. Brave Susan...

always so great.

Need

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He forced himself to concentrate on her image. That dark, pretty face. That uniform she had first worn at the school and so hated that she'd buried it deep in the TARDIS.

'Oh, Grandfather. I can't be seen wearing that.'

Not 'with it', she had told him. Not the sort of thing for a fan of John Smith and the Common Men. Susan...

And then that terrible day. Defeat of the Daleks and the liberation of Earth but... but he had been forced to make her stay behind. It had been what she needed, what she wanted in her heart. To stay with David Campbell and make a life for herself. A life away from him...

She had stood outside the TARDIS, tears pouring down her face, the key to the Ship clutched in her hand. 'One day, I shall come back. Yes, I shall come back...'

He was here now. Waiting.

'Susan?'

'Until then, there must be no regrets, no tears, no anxieties. ..'

The Doctor's voice was calm and assured.

Come back to me. Come back to me...

'I'm here, Grandfather.'

'Just go forward in all your beliefs, and prove to me that I am Her voice was strangely beautiful, haunting...

not mistaken in mine...'

Ace shivered.

Come back...

'Tell me who you are,' urged the Doctor.

'Goodbye, Susan. Goodbye, my dear...'

‘I am Susan...’ the apparition murmured.

Susan...

The Doctor chewed a fingernail thoughtfully. ‘Yes, you’re

‘Grandfather?’

Susan. But tell me why you’re here. Tell me what you seek.’

The Doctor’s eyes snapped open. Susan was standing Susan fluttered her eyelids and the light streaming from before him, a beautiful apparition, like a shaft of sunlight them stuttered. ‘I have always been here. There has always pouring through storm clouds. Her dark hair wafted around been me. But...’

her face and her hands were held open in welcome.

‘But?’ The Doctor held out his hands.

Like an angel, thought Ace.

Susan’s face seemed to fall, as though overwhelmed with Light poured from Susan’s eyes and mouth like sand from sadness. ‘There must be more than this. There must have a punctured bag.

been a better time. Not this need.’

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‘A better time. A simpler time,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s Susan rolled back her head and laughed, delighting in her what we all yearn for. The pain of wanting to belong own power. ‘I shall go on from here till the need is gone. I somewhere. To go home.’

shall consume!’

‘Home,’ repeated Susan.

The Doctor whipped around. ‘Now, Dr Cooper! Now!’

The Doctor stepped back a little. Susan raised her head.

Cooper slammed her fingers across various keyboards

‘But there is always need. I cannot rest.’

and each monitor screen flared with identical data. There

‘You have to feed?’

was a distant clunk from the dish above. Vijay and Robin

‘At first, I had only to consume a very little and was looked up.

content. But I have grown now, and the need has grown

‘Doctor?’ said Ace in puzzlement.

with me.’ Susan’s eyes began to shine with a fearful Cooper ran a hand over the console. ‘That’s it, Doctor. All incandescence. ‘I can smell them,’ she hissed, her voice systems overridden and concentrating on Bellatrix.’

harsher now. ‘Their regret. Their yearning for times past. It The room began to throb with power. The Doctor turned is so strong, so sweet. They fashion me into what they desire, back to Susan. ‘Can’t you feel it? Can’t you feel the energy?’

or what they fear and then... then I harvest.’

Susan twisted about, her figure stretching and distorting

‘Harvest?’ Cooper spat the work disgustedly.

as she attempted to locate the energy source. Radio waves The Doctor silenced her with a gesture. Susan inclined her honed in on the dish of the telescope.

head.

‘What is it?’ hissed Susan, her hair streaming behind her

‘There was much energy to be had. I grew stronger as the as though stirred by unseen currents. Light was forcing its years passed. I learned how to shepherd my prey together way through every part of Susan’s face, as though the and prevent them from leaving me...’

Sentience were shaking off the image.

‘What does it mean?’ said Ace.

‘A star,’ said the Doctor calmly. ‘An exploding star.

“The sickness anyone feels if they try to leave,’ said the Pushing outwards in a pure, brilliant surge of light and Doctor without taking his eyes off the apparition. ‘It creates energy. Can’t you feel it? Can’t you taste it?’

a barrier, preventing them getting out.’

The Sentience thrashed against the walls, Susan’s image

‘But not getting in,’ said Vijay quietly. ‘Like Mr Medway?’

flaring and billowing as light fountained from it.

The Doctor nodded. ‘Bees to a honeypot.’

The Doctor ran closer, pressing home his advantage.

Susan smiled slightly. ‘I found one who could see as I did.

‘Can’t you feel it? The energy of a whole star. It’s all yours.

An old man. Through his mind I saw the potential of this Take it. Take it!’

world.’

Susan’s face seemed to break into a smile before Billy Coote, thought Robin. So his second sight had been evaporating into a surge of blinding light. Golden fire real after all.

roared through her until there was only a blazing column of

‘And now?’ said the Doctor. ‘Now that you have grown?’

light dominating the room like some biblical miracle.

‘I can feel it!’ screamed the Sentience, its terrifying voice To consume properly, the Sentience would have to get resonating around the room. The walls began to shudder closer.

and crack.

It was strong enough now, strong enough to leave behind

‘I can taste it!’

the planet in which it had always existed.

Ace, Robin and Vijay threw themselves to the floor as The energy was weak, but once it had been fresh. The chairs and papers crashed around the room The Doctor and Sentience would have to go back. Back to when the star Cooper gripped the benches for dear life as a freezing wind exploded. And then it would feast.

blasted through the room. ‘Is it not... beautiful?’

Back. Back. Back.

The Doctor turned away as the column of fire expanded across the room, dazzles of brilliant white light searing his Cooper hugged Vijay to her. ‘I’m so sorry, my dear eyes. A screeching cacophony pounded at his ears and he friend.’ She kissed him and then held him at arm’s length.

thrust his head under the bench, sweat washing down his

‘There’s just the two of us now, I’m afraid. Think we can forehead.

manage?’

‘Beautiful! Beautiful!’

Vijay smiled thinly. He thought of Holly and immediately The Doctor lay down flat and covered his ears with his pushed the thought to the back of his mind.

hands. There was a tremendous wave of energy and he felt No.

his whole body being flattened. His eyes lolled back in their That was wrong. That’s how Holly... that’s why Holly died.

sockets and blood roared in his ears. He rolled himself into a By not accepting James's death and letting his memory ball and came to rest against the console. Then he opened fester inside her. Holly was dead.

his eyes.

He would grieve, very publicly and for as long as it took.

The makeshift polythene window had burst asunder and But he would remember her with joy.

a fine rain was blowing through.

'I think we'll manage,' he said at last, kissing Cooper Cooper poked her head over the top of the bench and fondly on the forehead.

looked around.

Robin grasped Ace's hand tightly. 'Well?'

Papers fluttered over the consoles.

Ace gazed into his lovely green eyes and bit her lip. 'I'm

'It's gone,' said the Doctor, sighing with relief. 'Gone to going to tell him. Tell him now.'

find its star.'

The Doctor was rummaging through his pockets. He pulled out the small, vellum-bound book which the Abbot The Sentience consumed the ancient radiation as it rushed had lent him and looked up, as though struck by a thought.

into the telescope's feed. Even at this distance, there was

'Doctor,' said Ace quietly. She placed a hand on his sleeve.

much to enjoy. So much energy pouring out of the dying

'Mm?'

stellar body. But it was still so far away. So far away.

'Doctor, I've ... I've decided to stay...'

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The Doctor blinked as though waking up. ‘Stay? Here?

He dashed across the room and lifted his hat. ‘I hate But you can’t. You ...’ He stopped and sucked his lower lip.

goodbyes. I’ll have Ace back here before you can say John

‘Of course you can.’

Robinson.’

Ace looked at her shoes. The Doctor turned and regarded He pushed open the double doors and was gone.

Robin. ‘I take it you’ve got something to do with this, young Ace turned to them all and shrugged. ‘I’ll be back soon.

man?’

Promise. Bye!’

Robin smiled his cheeky smile. ‘Guess so.’

Robin looked longingly after her. The doors clattered and Ace looked deeply into the Doctor’s eyes. ‘What about then immediately swung open again. Ace popped her head you?’

round the jamb. ‘Merry Christmas!’ she cried and vanished.

He smiled encouragingly. ‘I’ll be all right.’

‘I will miss you, Doctor.’ Ace felt the familiar numb pains The Doctor was scrabbling at his watch chain for the spreading to her palms and throat.

TARDIS key. He looked up at the sky which had cleared

‘And I shall miss you too, dear Ace.’

completely, leaving a dark, star-filled expanse. In Orion, one She flung herself into his arms and he held her tightly.

particular star was blazing wonderfully.

Ace pulled away, tears stinging her eyes.

Ace ran up behind the Doctor. ‘What’s the theory then, The Doctor looked at the book in his hand. ‘Would you do Doctor?’

one last thing for me?’

He spoke as he walked. ‘The nova is one hundred and ten

‘Of course,’ she said, sniffing back tears.

parsecs away, or thereabouts.’ He pointed into the night sky.

‘I want to test out a theory. Will you come with me, in the

‘See it?’

TARDIS? One last time?’

Ace craned her neck. ‘Oh yeah.’

Ace was taken aback. She looked over at Robin and then

‘Well, what’s that distance in light years?’

back at the Doctor. She owed it to him. ‘Er ... yeah. Yeah!

Ace grimaced. ‘Erm...’

Why not?’

‘There’s 3.259 light years to a parsec, or 19,160,000,000,000

The Doctor smiled and hurried over to Vijay and Cooper.

miles, so...’

Ace embraced Robin and kissed him fondly. ‘Won’t be

‘About three hundred and thirty light years?’

long. Promise.’

The Doctor smiled triumphantly. ‘About, yes, about. But He kissed her full on the lips, lingering for a long minute.

I’m willing to bet on another figure.’

‘Vijay,’ said the Doctor. ‘This nova of yours. What’s the Ace was intrigued. ‘What?’

distance from Earth?’

The Doctor pulled up sharp. ‘Three hundred and twenty-Vijay shrugged. ‘About a hundred and ten parsecs.’

four,’ he grinned.

The Doctor did a lightning calculation. ‘Of course!’

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George Lowcock counted to ten and pushed at the floor The tertiary console room was just as they had left it. The plate. He looked around the darkened church. Starlight Doctor stepped over to the console and let his fingers flutter glinted off the fallen lectern. The place was utterly silent.

over the controls.

Lowcock threw back the floor plate and clomped his way Ace picked up Susan’s uniform and folded it neatly over up the steps from the crypt.

the mirror, smiling wanly to herself. The TARDIS had been He wandered down the aisle, conscious of the shadows her home for so long. The only real home she’d ever known, looming in every corner, and grasped a tall candle.

and now...

Fumbling in his pockets he produced a lighter and lit the

‘Aha!’ cried the Doctor. ‘I knew it. It’s travelling candle, holding it high above his head.

backwards in Time. Fingers crossed, we should be able to

‘Nothing,’ he whispered, then raised his voice so that the get there first.’

villagers in the crypt could hear him. ‘Nothing! They’re

‘Get where, Doctor?’

gone!’

The Doctor turned and his eyes were twinkling with Slowly, like shell-shock victims staggering from a bunker, mischief. ‘Why, Crook Marsham, of course.’

the residents of Crook Marsham filed from the vault, Ace frowned.

blinking bemusedly.

Jill ran straight over to Lowcock. ‘Are you sure?’

The night was warm and balmy. Campfires glowed Lowcock held up his hand. ‘Listen.’

distantly.

Jill pricked up her ears, expecting the tinkle of breaking

‘Captain!’

glass. But a gentle sound was struggling to make itself Phillip Jackson turned to the soldier behind him. The heard at the edge of her awareness. A low, repeated hoot.

fellow was pointing towards the castle.

‘It’s an owl,’ she whispered.

‘What is it?’

Lowcock smiled.

‘There’s someone there, sir. I swear it. Down there, by the gates.’

The Doctor patted the TARDIS affectionately and pushed the key into the lock.

The Doctor stepped from the TARDIS and looked around.

‘Have you back in two shakes,’ he said to Ace, pushing The night was

pleasant, the air sweet. This was more like it.

open the door. Then he looked at her. ‘Thank you for Ace emerged behind him. ‘Where are we?’

coming with me.’

‘I told you. Crook Marsham.’

She smiled. ‘Least I could do.’

Ace looked at the imposing castle next to which the They went inside.

TARDIS had materialised. ‘When?’

‘Sixteen forty-four,’ said the Doctor.

Ace laughed in surprise.

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The Doctor gazed up at the battlements. ‘The light from

‘The castle was destroyed by a mysterious fire!’ shouted the exploding star has taken three hundred and twenty-four the Doctor above the rising din.

years to get to Earth. Which means?’

‘This is it?’

‘Which means that it actually went nova in 1644!’ cried The Doctor nodded, beginning to run back to the TARDIS.

Ace delightedly. ‘You are devious, Doctor.’

A few moments later, Jackson dashed from the gates, The Doctor shrugged and smiled. ‘I aim to please.’

mounted his horse and galloped away.

He strolled over to the cold stone walls. ‘My guess is that Ace could

feel the heat blasting against her as the castle the Sentience will follow the fossil radiation back to when it became virtually transparent. Halos of blistering fire roared was new, by going back through Time. To this evening.'

through the masonry.

'But how can you be so exact?'

'This is it!' cried the Doctor. 'The Sentience leaving Earth

'Another guess. This is Marsham Castle, in which our to find its star. Come on!'

friendly local Cavaliers are currently being frightened out of He pushed open the doors of the TARDIS and ushered their wits. Ah, there they go!'

Ace inside. Seconds later, the old ship protested out of solid The castle gates burst open and the Royalists ran out, existence.

screaming in terror.

The castle reached optimum brightness and then erupted The Doctor pointed up at the battlements, where a ball of into an immense fireball with a sound like planets colliding.

fiery light was forming. Ralph Grey looked over, his face a mask of horror, and then threw himself into space. Ace The Doctor fussed over the console, mumbling to himself.

grimaced.

He glanced at the scanner and then whooped with delight.

'It must've returned to its normal state now,' said the

'There!'

Doctor. 'And remained undisturbed as its future self They were in space now, and the roundel screen was arrives.'

dominated by an incredible outpouring of light and energy.

He looked about. There was silence. The Doctor checked The Bellatrix double comprised a white dwarf star and its his pocket watch.

companion. In the course of time, the companion star had Phillip Jackson rode up to the gateway, dismounted, grown enormously, but its evolution had been halted by the stepped over Grey's body and disappeared inside the castle.

proximity of the white dwarf.

The air was suddenly alive with power. Ace felt the hairs Material began to bleed from the companion on to the on her arms and neck stand up.

dwarf until it reached its maximum permissible mass. At

'Here it comes,' whispered the Doctor.

this point, the Chandreskhar limit, the dwarf underwent a The castle began to seethe with light, the old stones massive thermonuclear explosion.

themselves rippling and blurring.

The Sentience, however, knew nothing of this. All it could feel, all it could taste, was the bounty of the exploding star.

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It slipped free of Earth's atmosphere and sped across the Ace regarded the Doctor steadily. 'Where's it going?' 'Out galaxy at incredible speed, throbbing with power.

of the galaxy,' said the Doctor wonderingly. 'Out towards In an instant, it was there, writhing and wallowing in the Andromeda.' He looked up and smiled. 'M31. The Great astonishing blast of energy.

Spiral.'

'Need!' it sang to itself.

'And what's it looking for? Another nova?' The Doctor leant on the console and looked at her. 'No, better than that.

‘It’ll stay there until the star has exhausted itself,’ said the A supernova.’ He checked his instruments. ‘Yes, there it is.

Doctor. ‘Let’s nip forward a bit…’

It’s found one. A big one too.’

His fingers danced over a row of buttons.

Ace checked her watch. They’d been gone a good while The Sentience groaned with delight as the energy from the now but this was a time machine, after all. The Doctor could blazing red star flooded into it. If it could go on discovering drop her off only a minute after they’d left. She thought of these sources, these dying stars then, perhaps, the need Robin and smiled. The Doctor glanced at the scanner and would be fulfilled. Perhaps it might rest, at last..

frowned. ‘It’s gone.’

‘What about the star?’

The Doctor chewed his fingernails anxiously. ‘We’ll go

‘Finished. Dead.’ He stabbed at a display before him.

forward in Time again and see what it’s up to.’

‘Wait, I’ve got a trace. We can follow it.’

He cast a glance at the scanner and his eyes began to Ace joined him at the console. The Doctor frowned and widen.

then smiled. ‘Clever. Very clever…’

‘What is it, Doctor?’ said Ace worriedly.

‘If we’re lucky…’ he said under his breath.

The Sentience had sensed the star diminishing. How long Ace shrugged. ‘What? The star burns out?’

it had hovered there, drinking in the beautiful energy, it

‘No, no. Remember what I told you.’

couldn’t tell. But what was time to it? Now it was free to

‘It turns into a pulsar, right?’

roam through space, consuming anything it came across.

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor quietly. ‘Unless the core of the star is The eater of stars!

too massive for the neutrons to support it against gravity. In It sent out a portion of itself and suddenly shuddered which case the core continues to collapse.’

with delight. There was another star, somewhat more Ace shrugged. ‘Well?’

distant, but so powerful!

‘Continues to collapse until the gravity at its centre is Seconds later, the Sentience was storming out of the strong enough to form...?’ The Doctor raised his eyebrows galaxy.

expectantly.

Ace frowned, then smiled, then grinned as she realised what the Doctor was implying.

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Then a curious peace came over it as it vanished forever.

The Sentience was aware of the star’s death. Immediately, Perhaps it had finally come home.

it began to monitor the space around it for more energy. It was colossal now, stretching shimmering tendrils into the The Doctor flicked a switch and the scanner roundel vacuum.

darkened to the same hue as the others.

It would leave and find more stars.

‘It’s over,’ he sighed. ‘Consumed by the black hole.’

Nothing happened.

Ace breathed out delightedly. ‘Well...’

Once again, it attempted to leave and found that it could

‘Yes. Time you were getting back.’

not. It desired to be elsewhere and this had always been The Doctor looked at her steadily. He didn’t want to let easy to accomplish. Why not now? Besides, since it had her go but under normal circumstances he would have done.

grown greater the need was greater.

Under normal circumstances.

Already, the yawning emptiness seemed to burn within it.

But there was more at stake now...

The Sentience flexed a tendril but was dragged back

‘Crook Marsham 1968, here we come,’ he said brightly.

remorselessly towards the dead star.

This was impossible. It had to move. Get away. The star Ace had nothing much to pack and returned to the had nothing left to give. There was no more energy. There tertiary console room with her rucksack and bomber jacket.

was nothing but oblivion.

Her tape deck would have to stay as it was anachronistic For the first time in its ancient life, the Sentience felt and liable to cause a few raised eyebrows. Come to think of something akin to panic. It tried to wrench itself free, it, by the time Ian Brown and the Stone Roses came round, lashing its tendrils in fury, but the gravity of the star she’d probably be too old to like them any more. Funny wouldn’t permit it. Not even the Sentience could escape thought. But she had Robin now...

from a Black Hole.

She walked into the room uncertainly. The Doctor was at For a long moment, an eternity of experience flashed the console and the TARDIS

was just materialising.

through its consciousness. Sir Brian de Fillis and his wife,

‘Doctor?’

Harry Cooke and his daughters. Dyson and Scott from the He turned.

archaeological expedition. Dr Shearsmith, Jack Prudhoe, Ace bit her lip. ‘Everything we talked about before. You Win Prudhoe, Betty and Lawrence Yeadon, Abbot will be OK now?’

Winstanley...

The Doctor smiled. ‘You know, the Elizabethans thought Need. Cannot die. Still need. Must go on. Must...

nostalgia was a diagnosable disease. Perhaps they were Holly Kidd. Edmund Trevithick...

right.’ He sighed. ‘Thanks to you, Ace, I know that what’s Must go on... Must... Must...

done ... is done. No sense living in the past. The only way The Sentience shimmered briefly like a firefly.

for me is forward. Always forward.’

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Ace moved to hug the Doctor one more time but he shook his head. ‘Just go. I’ll slip away quietly. No fuss.’

Ace nodded silently, feeling the tears well up in her eyes.

Then she ran through the double doors without looking back.

Epilogue

Expecting the familiar moorland, she was somewhat surprised to find herself on a broad stretch of beach.

The sand glistened like pomegranate seeds and the sky above her was a lovely, dusky purple. A breeze was blowing through a dense forest to her right. Three moons hung low over the horizon.

‘Doctor,’ she said in a low whisper. ‘You’ve got it wrong.’

Robin waited for a very long time. In fact, for over five She ducked back into the TARDIS. The tertiary console months, never a day passed without him making the trip to room was empty and silent, save for the familiar hum of the telescope. Just in case. But she never came back.

machinery. Ace noticed several switches clicking into life.

Perhaps it was for the best. If, as she’d said, she was from Ace stepped over the threshold. The doors swung shut of the future, then living through her time again might have their own accord and the TARDIS dematerialised proven very difficult. But Robin missed her so much.

automatically.

He became very close to Dr Cooper and Vijay Degun and She grasped the brass door knob and threw open the it was good to have friends who understood what he was interior door, racing into the corridor beyond.

going through now that Lawrence was gone too. It had been

‘Doctor! Take me back! I have to go back! I have to!’

a terrible time for them all.

There was no reply. Ace ran down the corridor, fresh tears Robin read the official account in the paper some time springing to her eyes. ‘Doctor! You promised! Take me back!

later. Poison gas, they said, from under the ground.

The light in the grey corridor was dim and cheerless. Ace Couldn’t have been anticipated. Nobody’s fault. He was wheeled around,

already hopelessly lost. She slid down the surprised to see how many of those who'd had the worst roundelled wall and buried her head in her hands. 'Take me scares were the first to deny anything out of the ordinary.

back.'

Probably just their way of dealing with it.

Robin didn't stay long in Crook Marsham, however. He moved to York and then to London. Occasionally, he got a postcard from Jill Mason. She seemed never to settle down.

Always at some political flashpoint or another.

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Vijay and Dr Cooper he saw more frequently now they were back in Cambridge. They had all put the village behind them. Too many memories. Far too many...

The tracking station was closed down almost at once, dark noises being made about risking government property and Author's Notes

lives (in that order) in such an unstable geological area.

The great telescope dish stood through another three winters until it was dismantled. Eventually, even the concrete shell of the station buildings, stained and broken by the elements, disappeared.

And there was only the rain. And the moor. Always, the moor.

Prologue

THE END

I knew from the beginning that I wanted a prologue set on Gallifrey with the first Doctor running away. Susan featured in the original draft, as I recall but I was asked to take her out so as to leave her origins more mysterious. She could be waiting for the old man inside the un-disguised TARDIS or he could find her somewhere else later. I still think it's a rather nice prologue, though it's a bit purple and, as Joseph II might put it there are "too many notes".

The very last line where the Time Lord realises the TARDIS has been stolen and says 'Oh no, this really won't do at all' continues the long tradition of the Time Lords'

occasional, lovely forays into the vernacular (see the Master's terse "D'you wanna rot in 'ere for the rest of yer natural?" in Frontier in Space). The best example, of course, being the wonderful line at the end of the novelization of The War Games when, having despatched the Doctor for his summary regeneration, one of the prosecutors comments:

"Shame. He would've brightened the place up no end." I 304

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remember being very disappointed that this wasn't in the It's fascinating now to read this. It's like a snapshot of my TV version!

past, appropriately enough. So many of the character and place names are of people I knew then but not any more; Chapter One

Holland, Railton, Yeadon, Bayles and Vijay Degun! I used to work in a nursery and one of my charges was a wonderful The story's setting came from a desire to redress Doctor kid of that name, one of the brightest, funniest children I've Who's South East bias. As a Northerner myself, I felt it was ever known. What became of him, I wonder? He'd be, God, high time an adventure took place further up than Watford twenty one now! (I've just Googled him. Looks like he does though it seems odd now that I chose Yorkshire rather than

something in West Yorkshire Trading Standards!) the North-East which is where I'm from. It was probably a There's a lot of set up in this chapter but it's still pretty combination of having recently been to college in Yorkshire, atmospheric. Lots of my own Christmas memories have the moors (I once spent such a day in Ilkley with... well, been pressed into service here and the sequence where Jack that's another story) and, I suppose, not to want to look too Prudhoe chases his wife's phantom onto the moor still obvious (ie Darlington writer sets story in Darlington) makes me tingle a bit.

Either that or the fact that the fairly recent Mark of the Rani Edmund Trevithick is a composite figure. He's a grumpy had been set in Geordie-land.

old actor (my favourite kind) who used to star in a TV series I think it began life with a present day setting but then that isn't quite Quatermass and isn't quite Doctor Who.

Peter Darvill-Evans suggested some recent historical date I was utterly obsessed by Quatermass at that time (and and 1970 was briefly debated. I said I couldn't imagine making a short spoof with Reece and Steve, soon to be of setting anything in 1970! But then I remembered a story one The League of Gentlemen). I wanted some of Nigel Kneale's of my teachers had told me. He'd been the only hippy in grittiness to rub off on this story and, as I've said, make it Jarrow and recalled waiting outside the Pictures in kaftan more like the Doctor Who I remembered and loved. A year and Lennon specs with big, surly blokes on all sides waiting or so later when I was making The Zero Imperative with Bill for any excuse to smash his head in. It takes guts to stand Baggs, Gary Gillett mocked up some videos that can just be out from the crowd.

made out on Jon Pertwee's shelves. They were Nightshade, What began to interest me was the notion that the 60s Nightshade 2 and Nightshade and the Imps. I don't think obviously didn't swing everywhere. So how about the anyone ever noticed!

TARDIS pitching up in a tiny backwater during one of the The one bit I can't bear is the first paragraph of this most momentous years of the century? There'd be a sense chapter: "Perhaps the world was dreaming"... etc. I know I that life was being lived elsewhere and a village full of wanted some kind of "It was the best of times, it was the people all yearning, in one way or another, for a vanished worst of times" feel but it now looks so bolted on and just past. But then life - or death - would catch up with them...

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plain weird. Much better to just crack on with the story.

I was keen to get something like a real romance going in Which is what I suggest we do now.

the story as I felt baffled and confused by the recent TV

attempts at it, particularly the scene in Curse of Fenric Chapter Two

between Ace and the soldier. I mean, what was that about? I don't know why Ace should fall for this particular bloke but Why has the Doctor decided to retire? I have no idea. I Robin seems quite a decent sort and pretty dishy.

suppose, ideally, this story would've come after some Another personal prejudice - this time given to Trevithick momentous, life-changing experience but it doesn't. There's

- is the preference for the wintry seasons. From the 'burnt a gap there, should anyone want to pop a story in! Anyway, turnip smells of Hallowe'en' (we call them turnips where I here's the Seventh Doctor and Ace as I felt I'd like to see come from, although they're really swedes and we used to them. The Doctor's savage response to being called hollow them out and put candles in them. Pumpkins were Professor was simply a reflection of my own prejudice. I just only ever glimpsed in American films. Eeh, we were poor hated that affectation. The Doctor himself is feeling but we were 'appy) to Christmas. I couldn't bear the nostalgic, tying in with the theme of the whole adventure, summer. Now I'm older, I love the summer and, though missing his home, or whatever home represents.

there's nothing quite like the smoky loveliness of October I created the Tertiary Console Room because I thought it'd and the magic of Christmas, I find I absolutely dread the be lovely to have one and I was very fan-boyish about the dark winter evenings. Maybe I'm afraid there's something TARDIS in those days. Christopher H Bidmead had sort of out there...

created TARDIS lore overnight and the notion of an infinite I had a shot-silk blue dressing gown at the time, which is ship slightly obsessed me. I remember loving the idea of a why the Doctor's wearing one and I notice how much Ace's patch of open ground inside the TARDIS and I think there's

'tape-deck' now leaps out as a period touch! Tape-deck!

a beach in another of my books. I wanted the third control Imagine!

room to be like a church with the console like an altar and I'm sure I hoped it would be used by every other writer on Chapter Three

the New Adventures - which it wasn't! I have a feeling it might've turned up in one.

I remember reading in a review somewhere that the Betty Yeadon's brother being eaten by sharks is directly characters of Winstanley and Hawthorne were there as a inspired by the famous Indianapolis speech in Jaws - a film I tribute to The Daemons. This isn't quite true. Although the absolutely adore. I suppose Alf is more likely to have been cut-off village is a Doctor Who staple and I adored The on an Atlantic convoy than in the Pacific but there are no Daemons, the names were certainly unconsciously man-eating sharks in the Atlantic...

borrowed. At that time, I hadn't seen the story in years and named the Abbot after my friend's dad! I suppose 308

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Hawthorne was prickly so that's why he ended up with that Nigel Kneale, of course, invented the concept but it never name, although Damaris Hayman may have been, as I say, loses its thrill or its spookiness. So here it is again, couched lurking at the back of my mind.

in my best cod-17th Century...

The Doctor's memory of falling off the radio telescope couldn't really be avoided. I mean, you would think about it, Chapter Four

wouldn't you? I've always had a soft spot for Logopolis. So baffling but so strange. And with a funeral quality unlike Ah, the Civil War! So good, we actually had three of 'em.

any other story. In fact, a reference to it recurred in my new No mystery here. Always been faintly obsessed by this TV episode The Idiot's Lantern but it was cut at a late stage.

period and eventually got to do a full Troughton historical Shame!

on the subject. I decided to dramatise the incident in the A lot of my own Christmas memories are again rolled out manner of a flashback. It was a chance to write some here. I have such sharp recollections of those wonderful

'period' dialogue but also a little snapshot of summer times, the smells, the colours, the sheer excitement. The light amongst all the wintriness. It's quite a nice section, I think that snow gives off through curtains, the cold lino in the and the battle's well-drawn. Did I put Captain Jackson in kitchen, trying to resist the temptation to tear open all the The Roundheads? Can't remember. I should have done!

presents at once. My love affair with Christmas goes back Phillip Jackson's name leaps out at me because the actor forever. I was always a nostalgic child. My Mam used to say of that name is now a friend of mine. Also, Sir Brian de Fillis I had an old soul. I remember desperately wanting to leave is named after someone I knew in Leeds and lost touch with school so that we could have a reunion! It's a strange who's now written a script about Fanny Cradock in which affliction and I had it bad. I always wanted to be older, more I'm about to play her husband. How strange. How nostalgic!

experienced. Now I am - oh to be nineteen again! Haha.

It's here that the horror starts to kick in too. More than The fate of Professor Quatermass's daughter and anything, I wanted Nightshade to be a horror story and granddaughter are given to Trevithick here as a nod. I poor Sir Harry being dissolved by the terrible things that supposed, naively, that only a few people would pick up on have taken on the shape of his dead children is as grim as these references but then I was young and little steeped in my Doctor Who gets.

the madness of fandom! In a similar way, the reference to the Doctor outside the Cyber tombs speaking to Victoria Chapter Five

about his family was a nice little reference. Little did I know that the

story would be found soon after so that the Dr Hawthorne's racism grew out of the setting, I think, in reference looked almost trendy.

that '68 was the year of Enoch Powell's infamous Rivers of Still on a Quatermass theme, I've always loved the notion Blood speech. I thought it would be interesting to have a of sinister happenings being discovered in ancient texts.

British Asian at the centre of the story and highlight both 310

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the naked nastiness of Hawthorne's generation alongside Chapter Six

the casual racism of someone like Mrs Crithin who considers Vijay nice enough but still a 'darkie'. Overall, it Things are getting very bitty around here, it seems to me. I now all seems very right on and straining to be PC but, hey, suppose they're like cut away scenes which probably means this was the Nineties!

I was thinking more in terms of screenplay than book at this Hawthorne's fear of the Tar Baby seemed like a neat idea point! Very naughty.

and it's a fear I shared as a child, along with wolves, the Robin very selfishly deserts his step-mother as he thinks Child Catcher and the little Troll from Terror of the Autons.

he's on a promise with Ace. Although this looks terribly Little things, actually, have always given me the creeps.

heartless, I think we all are from time to time. And she is I remember doing a lot of reading in order to find the only his step-mother...

right star to explode. Bellatrix seemed the ideal candidate I'm not quite sure why the Sentience makes people rot but but I made it a double star so that I could blow up without it's good for description you have to admit. To this day, I wiping it out all together! No-one seems ever to have can rattle off horrific descriptions of putrefaction and noticed the extra one.

monstrousness without pausing for breath. It's the I cringe slightly at

the Doctor ordering ginger beer from straighter stuff that takes time. I like ‘a wide green stain like the pub. It seems a bit neutered now. Certainly, I think fruit mould’.

there’s nothing wrong with the Doctor having a pint and, There’s some more description of my old Christmases given the mood he’s in, you’d forgive him if he got roundly here - particularly waiting at the top of the stairs for the bladdered.

parental say-so - this time given to the character of Medway.

A primary school teacher of mine had cut out “- agile I suppose I’ve always been nostalgic for a Christmas I never Wit” from a cardboard box, just as in the story, and pinned quite had and hate the idea of it becoming about “slippers it to his door. I suppose it’s the sort of thing you do when and hankies” rather than magical things but that’s inevitable.

you’re at a loose end.

The road-side posts with hexagonal reflectors that Back to scary things, I’ve always had a bit of a thing about Medway passes are in the North Yorks moors and they used waking up to find some sitting on the end of the bed. As a to fascinate me as a kid. They’re really tall so that can show kid, the idea of it scared the life out of me and I can up over the snowdrifts. Last Christmas I went with my Dad remember one night, after watching The Devil Rides Out, up to High Force, a fantastic waterfall in that region which I being absolutely certain that there was something there. I hadn’t been to in years. We drove past those posts and my was utterly unable to turn on the light just in case the first thought was of Nightshade.

pressure I was sure I could feel turned out to be, well, The Doctor is very cold towards Ace and her burgeoning probably something little...

relationship here. Is he jealous? Or merely angry that he’s got himself involved - again? There’s a little prefiguring of 312

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the more emotional slant of the new series here, I suppose beloved was dead when his property turned up, complete but then that was

the ethic of the New Adventures. To be with bayoneted pocket-book, its pages stiff with blood.

broader and deeper. To boldly go... sorry.

I rather like the section where Ace muses on the 60s and the idea of the old stones of the monastery having witnessed Chapter Seven

countless generations musing over the same thoughts. I often get to thinking that way. These bricks will be here long I laughed when I saw that the Doctor says Whatever! Of after I've gone. But then, they'll never have lived!

course, he'd know about early 21st Century slang, wouldn't It's worth saying here, of course, that P.J. Hammond's he?

Sapphire and Steel was a huge influence on the book and Mr Peel's comment "It's these blackie postmen", comes there are lots of bits (opaque black eyes for one!) that from the film Billy Liar and I put it in because it's always reference it. The main one here is the singing of "Pack up made me laugh. I love listening to old people and the your troubles" which features in Adventure Two (or The magical, sometimes outrageous things they come out with.

One in the Railway Station). It's worth pointing out, though, It's probably why there's a preponderance of elderly that like the Tomb of the Cybermen reference, this was done characters in my stuff (Trevithick, Whistler in Last of the before S and S had been released on video and so was much Gaderene, Mrs Peace in The Unquiet Dead and the more of a nostalgic nod than will appear today when Grandma in The Idiot's Lantern).

everything is available and everyone knows everything! I When I was at college we were sent out to interview old still marvel at the atmosphere of that show. The man is a people for a project. My student digs were next door to one, genius.

as it happened, so I popped over with a tape recorder and The child poisoned by berries was inspired by my Dad's spent a lovely hour with an old dear who waxed nostalgic brother who died in this way back in the Twenties. He was about all manner of things then suddenly broke down at the called Harry and, after his death, my grandparents had memory of her late husband. I've never forgotten it and another child and called him Harry. Isn't that odd? You how uncomfortable and intrusive I suddenly felt. Also, I can't imagine a family doing that today.

once talked to an old man who remembered working in a The evil Jesus! That's quite brave. Probably wouldn't be field in Yorkshire when a young lad came running over to allowed now. It's nasty. I'm sure it was inspired by a bit in say the Titanic had gone down. Imagine that. Amazing.

The Martian Chronicles were a priest whose lost his faith This leads me into Mrs Holland's sad recollection of accidentally forces an alien into appearing as he wants him discovering her husband had been killed in the Great War.

to be. As a kid, though, I was scared of the Christ. In Sunday It's based on a real incident where a telegram was sent but School pictures he had these horrible, wet, brown eyes - like failed to arrive and the poor widow only realised her a King Charles spaniel - and it gave me the creeps.

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yearning for home and better times that lies at the heart of the Doctor's problem.

This chapter is mostly the monster chasing Trevithick and And now here comes The Sentience! So called, I suppose I wrote it straight through in one, excited burst and hardly because it felt a bit like the Intelligence and Doctor Who changed a word. I went home to write most of the book and creatures always need a name like that. It's the first of the I can vividly remember sitting in the spare room, bashing non-corporeal floaty aliens with which I seem to have an away on my Amstrad, the green screen flaring, the dot-obsession. I just can't seem to shake them though I promise matrix printer taking forever but just being so inspired and one day to do a 'once-proud' militaristic race based on, oh excited by this section. I went downstairs for my tea with let's say, hedgehogs. Billy Coote becomes a medium for the the sense of a good day's work done! There's more Jaws, of floaty alien just as Gwyneth does in The Unquiet Dead. As course, in the exploding fire-extinguisher.

Alan Bennett says, we've only got a few beans in our tin to I once read somewhere that Trevithick stops at Level 18

rattle!

(of a possible 27) in the lift because this story would have The sequence where Trevithick dreams of the monster been part of Season 27 and that I was well known for bursting through the window as he watches TV was written thinking that the programme went downhill after Season 18!

to make sense of the cover! It bothered me that there was no This isn't true, although I used to be very fond of Season 18

such scene in the book. I doubt I'd be so literal these days.

(not so much these days).

And Ace has Nitro-Nine A in her rucksack. Takes you back, doesn't it?

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Of course, the Doctor seeing the ghostly Susan would've had more impact if it hadn't been for The Five Doctors, but I wanted to do something new with the Sentience so that you can't have everything! I've always been intrigued by it wasn't just another alien invader. I think Doctor Who Susan. I used to think, in a very fan-boyish way, that she could stand a few more Earth-based menaces but I hit upon just called the Doctor grandfather but it's clear that he's just the idea that the thing actually predated the Earth. That in that. So just who is Mrs Who?

some, thankfully unfathomable way, the Earth had formed I wanted to use the flavour of that first, heart-breaking around it and it was stuck, like a living fossil or, as goodbye in The Dalek Invasion of Earth to show that the Trevithick describes it, like the letters in Blackpool rock.

Doctor had never quite got over Susan and that all his I think I had the Doctor dislocate his shoulder because I subsequent companions have, in some way, been an attempt thought he needed roughing up a bit. He's suffering to get back to that first relationship. So Susan symbolises the throughout the story and it added to the grit to see him in real pain. Besides, this wasn't long after we'd seen James 316

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Bond bleed in the terrific and underrated Licence to Kill so I And now the church is overrun by gas-masked zombies, thought it high time the Doctor got a bit of a kicking.

one of which, when unmasked has a totally blank face!

Interesting that, down in the cave, there's a lull followed Could be on the telly now, eh?

by Trevithick saying "It's so cold," just as Dickens does in I find the amount of exposition here a bit troubling and The Unquiet Dead. This is a ghost story staple, I suppose pat. Everything is explained by the Sentience, even down to and just something I absorbed into my DNA years ago. All using Billy Coote as a medium and discovering through him my stories are ghost stories in a way.

the possibilities of the Earth. But the idea of sending it to In the original plan, it was Vijay who died, not Holly, but feed off the exploding star is very neat as is the very I remember becoming much fonder of his character as I Quatermass-esque idea of the Civil War explosion being scribbled away so it was poor Holly who got it in the neck. I caused by the Sentience going backwards in Time to when quite like the idea that some of the Sentience's victims the star first went nova. On reflection, it would've been almost welcomed it as a release from their grief.

much neater if it had been that star that had somehow Reading this again, I find Trevithick's last stand rather collapsed on itself and become a Black Hole rather than moving. The old man becoming the TV hero he always having the Sentience roam around a bit, snacking, before wanted to be. I find any goodbye unbearably sad. I saw in a getting snared!

documentary the other day that Chaplin's brother used to The Stone Roses reference leaps out a bit, doesn't it? I cry at every sunset. I know that feeling. I cried when think it was my attempt at being hip and it's as Magpie ended. I cry when Blue Peter presenters leave, even uncomfortable to read as I felt doing it! Mind you, Ian if I've never seen them. On that subject, I remember tuning Brown was very sexy in those days before he turned into an in a few years ago when, quite by chance they announced, emaciated ape.

"for older viewers", that Goldie had died. I fell to bits. And And now the ending. The Doctor tricks Ace and never don't get me started on The Green Death...

returns

her

to

Crook

Marsham.

Under

normal

"Why do people have to keep dying?" opines Vijay. Well, circumstances, it says here, he would have done but 'there it's grim up

North.

was more at stake now'. What does that mean? I don't know!

I only know that I was told it would be wrapped up in the Chapter Eleven and Epilogue

next book and I remember picking up Love and War only to find there was no reference to it whatsoever! No fault of In the church, Locock uses tattered military colours to Paul Cornell's, of course, but I was just baffled. How could spear the WWI ghost. This was directly inspired by the she forgive the Doctor so easily? Was it ever referred to Durham Light Infantry chapel in Durham Cathedral where again? Answers on a postcard please.

such colours hang, quietly mouldering, to this day. I've So that was my first Doctor Who book. I was thrilled at always found them sinister.

how it was received and then found myself unable to come 318

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up with another. Virgin turned down a curious space opera called The Black Death and a massively over-elaborate Jack the Ripper story called The Maniac's Tear before finally letting me have another shot with St Anthony's Fire - for which I have no fondness whatsoever. I remain deeply grateful to Peter Darvill-Evans for giving my first break and for being so encouraging. I still think it's the best original idea I've had.

It's been very nice to revisit Nightshade but nostalgia, as you should know by now, is dangerous. I promise not to think of it again until I'm in an old people's home. If you happen to be sitting next to me and I start banging on about the old days, just keep your eyes peeled. There might be something emerging from the shadows. Something huge...

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